

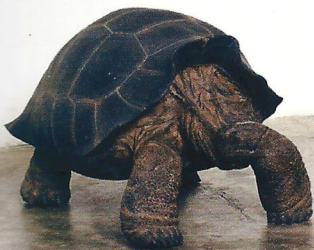
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MOVING PICTURES

GALLERIST SUNDARAM TAGORE GOES BEHIND THE CAMERA FOR HIS FIRST FEATURE FILM, *THE POETICS OF COLOUR: NATVAR BHAVSAR, AN ARTIST'S JOURNEY*.

WORDS YVONNE XU



To gallerist and art historian Sundaram Tagore, art is that which extends one's vision of the universe. "Art doesn't just to be compositional art, or a musical performance; it can be anything in life. As long as it extends my vision of the universe, it is art." That's why Tagore never stops at just what he does – running his eponymous galleries in Hong Kong, Los Angeles and New York (and very soon, Singapore too). He's just completed his first feature film on Indian artist Natvar Bhavsar and is already in post-production for his second one, which centres on a totally different subject – the great architect Louis Kahn.

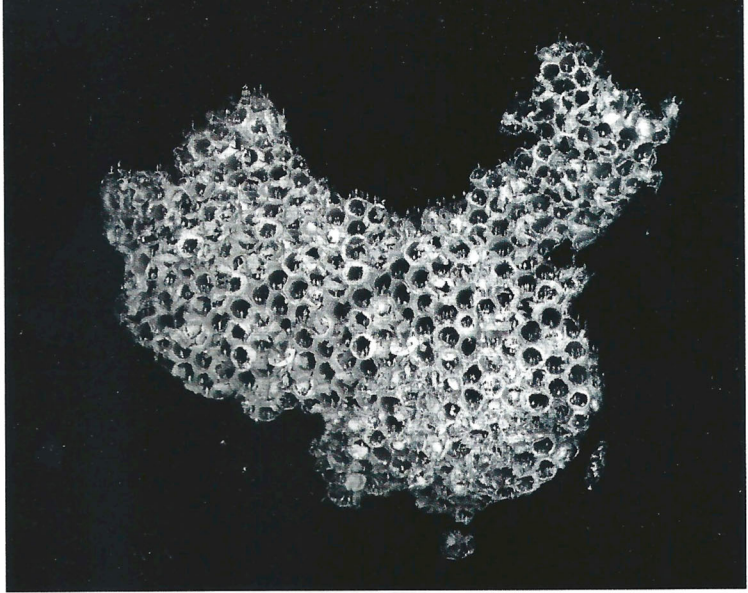
Tagore, who is in Singapore for the local premiere of *The Poetics of Colour: Natvar Bhavsar, An Artist's Journey*, says filmmaking has been a long time coming for him. "When I decided to finally do it, I knew I needed to find a subject matter I knew really well. Film is a really expensive affair," he explains. "I had interacted with Natvar for over 15 years – I knew every single location of the building [he worked in]. More importantly, I devoted my whole life to the idea of East-West exchange, and Natvar, as someone coming from India to New York really represented that idea, the idea of the diaspora culture, of the transnational identity."

The subject matter is deeply personal to Tagore, who led a nomadic childhood even before he became a globetrotting gallerist. "My family was very bohemian, very nomadic. They were artists," says Tagore, whose grandfather is the Indian poet and Nobel Peace Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore. "Every now and then, for no rhyme or reason, they would pull us out of school and take us to the tribal village. I kind of developed an empathy with people who are on the margins. I always feel like I am at the



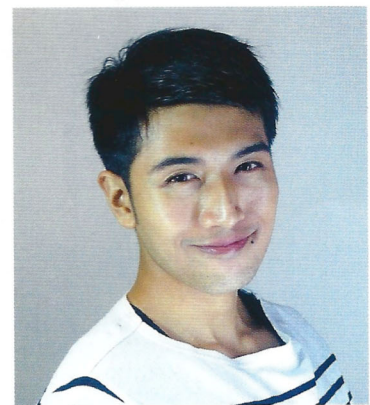
With a slight air of sorrow, Gao Zhen admits that it's a struggle to make a significant impact on the general populace through art. "Artists don't have a big influence [on the people of China]. Perhaps in certain circles, but for the majority of the population, revolution is led by small uprisings." He is, however, confident that change is ahead. "If you look far ahead, China will become more open. But for now, the country has taken a step backward and become more controlled." The social network Renren, China's equivalent of Facebook, still allows for viral messages to spread for up to half an hour before the accounts are shut down. The Gao Brothers actively use the network and say it has a greater influence over China's society than the art world.

Also showing at Vue Privée as part of *Staging Art* was Aiman Hakim, a 27-year-old Singaporean artist whose works often deal with conformity in society,

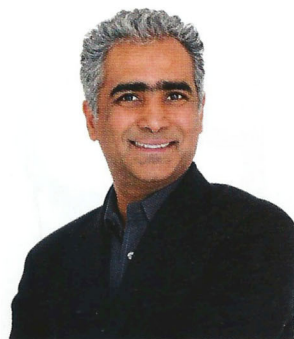


exploring the "absurd" notion of self-individuation in a culture where communal ideologies still dominate. He describes conformity as a "blocked energy flow"; one stunning artwork depicts masked men in white holding back another group of men in red who are trying to free a chained horse. It portrays the line between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' in society, he explains, with the men in white protected from external problems by their masks, the unmasked men chained to symbols of violence and greed, and the horse representing freedom.

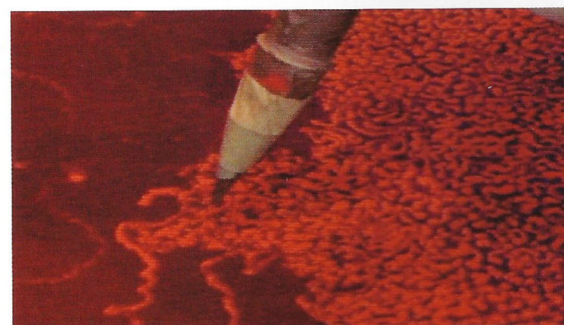
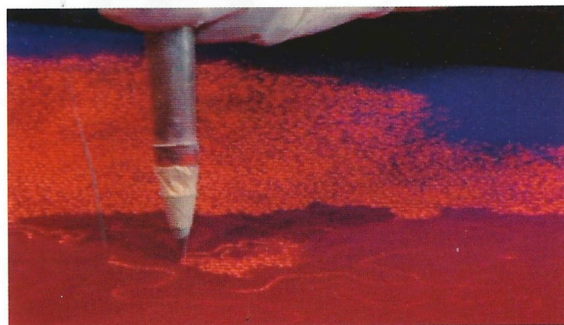
Many of Hakim's works feature toys or toy-like figures, and symbols of super-herodom. These iconic representations of 'perfect men' places them in new context, and are explorations of the artist's questions about freedom and control, and whether societies requires limits in the name of greater freedom or securities for their people. "As an artist, I constantly [push] myself conceptually and technically, producing works of art that I hope would best represent me, my opinions, ideas, as well as suggestions on various issues of which I feel strongly about," he says. vueprivee.com



(CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT) The Gao Brothers with their *Portrait of Ai Weiwei*; *The Utopia of Hugging for 20 Minutes* by Gao Brothers; *Outer Space Project - Map of China* by Gao Brothers; Aiman Hakim; *That Playtime Before Bedtime Final* by Aiman Hakim.



(CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT) Merrill Wagner installation; Robert Polidori *Salle du Crimée Sud* - a work for sale at Sundaram Tagore Gallery; Curator and filmmaker Sundaram Tagore; Scenes from the film *The Poetics of Colour*.



margin when I come back to India; I feel like an outsider. When I'm in New York I'm an outsider and an insider. Now I'm living in Hong Kong, I feel the same, as if being on a tightrope and treading it very lightly; it makes you very aware. And there is empathy generated from being not from within and being able to connect with people from a purely human relationship – doesn't matter who they or where they come from – and there is a romance, a poetry about that.

This poetry is what Tagore also brings into his film, which he says draws inspiration from the work of directorial greats like Wong Kar Wai, Roberto Rossellini, Satyajit Ray and even classic Bollywood films. "In Satyajit Ray's *Charulata*, the protagonist is smoking and the smoke weaves around the room and the camera will be following that," he explains. "That's very painterly, very poetic. So when you look at the tools (of the painter) laid out, the camera weaves around it. I also used symbolism of the cyclists [representing] the lonely individual, or of a door closing or a stair leading up saying that chapter is over or representing the struggle to get to the top."

With these tropes worked in, the film becomes a highly cinematic experience, one that successfully balances the heavier, discursive parts (with some of the most renowned authorities from the art world speaking, or, in Tagore's words, "almost pontificating") with segments of pure cinema.

To continue his promotion of East-West dialogue, Tagore says his second full-length feature film will look at the conversation from the reverse side, with an American architect who came to work in the subcontinent. sundaramtagore.com 