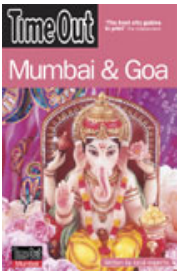




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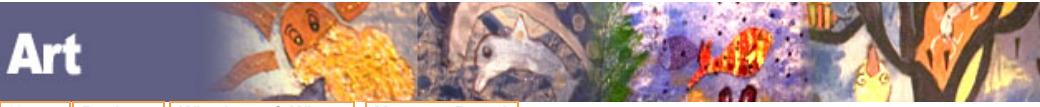
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/art/arts_preview_details.asp, line 138

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Past master

Priya Sen's video works explore the construction of memories and cities, finds **Zeenat**

Nagree.



An unsteady camera wanders through the passageways of an old house in Kolkata. The lens stops to examine minutiae: the light pouring in from a metal grill, the dirt gathered between the teeth of a comb and the unopened letters on a windowsill. The video fragments, which present a portrait of the house once occupied by artist Priya Sen's grandparents, will be showcased in her second solo exhibition *Place Unconsidered, Trilogy* at Project 88. Through two video installations and accompanying photographs, Sen grapples with how we construct memories and, through the exploration of changing cityscapes, how we struggle to capture the present.

"This is not a memory project," Sen told *Time Out* in a phone interview from Delhi. "It's not about events that happened but

about ways of remembering. Because often one remembers in fragments and pieces that don't link up. The past is changeable and memory is fiction. It changes as you change." Sen's camera wanders almost aimlessly through her grandparents' house, dwelling on details but not trying to tell a coherent story. The footage is interspersed with poems and images from *A Book of Delights*, a 1957 anthology that Sen found in the house and which she felt captured the feeling of the place.

"When I think of my childhood or childhood in general, I always associate it with places," said Sen. Shot in 2006, Sen first displayed the video in 2008 as part of the *Indian Highway* exhibition in London's Serpentine Gallery. In the Mumbai show, the video is part of a three-screen installation titled *Antecedent Garden Vol. 3: Out of Distance*, which attempts to explore not just Sen's childhood but how people construct memories of childhood. It ties together oblique references to Sen's life with unrelated and often esoteric representations of ideas and places that she has encountered over the last four years.

Where the first video in *Antecedent Garden* features footage from Sen's grandparents' house, the second video, shot last year, was triggered by an old book Sen found on the gardens and parks of Nottingham, where she lived in 2010 during a residency. The work features stills of the British city's parks with quotes from the book. The garden, which alludes to childhood, was a "compelling" concept for Sen. "It is a location in which it is possible for things to grow and come into being," said Sen. The video grows too, travelling first to London's Victoria & Albert Museum of Childhood and then to the office of a tea auction house in Kolkata. (Sen's father worked in a tea company.) Stills of the building are shown alongside quotes from the company's journals. The third video in the installation, shot this year using a cell phone, features footage of an abandoned skating rink and golf course that the artist found near Shimla. In a note about the work, Sen writes, "It is possible that there is a measure of distance between the landscapes of one's childhood and the ones that are recreated to stand in for them."



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The landscape of childhood – remembered and fictional – is replaced by the changing landscape of the city in the second video installation titled *I am not out to create atmospheres*. This video is more straightforward, focusing on the moment when Delhi, the city in which Sen lives, was undergoing radical transformation for the Commonwealth Games. Sen guides her camera at night through an unidentified road in the capital, where concrete columns rise out of pits, cranes gouge the earth and workers listen to the radio as they take a break. “The main idea is to try and find a way to talk about not being able to articulate the present moment,” said Sen. The ominous structures stand silently but they will soon transform the landscape. The video will be accompanied by stills of workers laying the foundations of a metro line in the dark.

Sen’s *I am not...* stems from her continued interest in Delhi and her six-year-long involvement with Sarai, a digital archive of urban spaces. The artist has also worked with Sarai initiators Monica Narula, Shuddhabrata Sengupta and Jeebesh Bagchi of the Raqs Media Collective, editing footage and designing the sound for their recent video installation *The Capital of Accumulation*. “Sarai opened up my view of the city,” said Sen. “We produced a lot of collective work. So this exhibition is a shift for me. It is only now that I am showing my work as my own.”

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