



Piyali Sadhukhan
Kingdom of Cards
4 December 2021 – 14 January 2022
Curated by Siddhi Shailendra
Akar Prakar, New Delhi

Opening Reception: Saturday, 4th December 2021 | 6 - 9 PM

Drawing inspiration from literature, history and media, Piyali Sadhukhan's latest solo exhibition is a visceral portrayal of historical events and our shared lived experiences. The works in Sadhukhan's latest series provides the space for the viewers to get intimate with the works on display and offers them the opportunity to question the fantastical realities of our times.

One of the most striking works the audience encounters, the namesake of the exhibition, *Kingdom of Cards*, was inspired by the recent pandemic. Adopting its title from Rabindranath Tagore's 1933 play of the same name (original title *Tasher Desh* in Bengali), the work illustrates the people continuing to worship their gods, even while drowning and the world around them is burning. Sadhukhan uses Tagore's metaphor of the island Kingdom where life under fascist rule has become the norm to portray this reality and highlights the ramifications of blind faith in our gods and leaders.

Her works deal with themes of gendered violence and politics in both Indian and global contexts. Often influenced by historically relevant events, such as the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. Another highlight in this exhibition is the diptych *Guardians of Honour*. The dual-faced ram, recalls the two-faced Roman figure of Janus, the god of duality, paired with the veiled female figure that is bleeding flowers. The work is a reflection on the duplicity of such "guardians" or protectors that end up becoming their prisoners.

Similarly, in the work *Annunciation* Sadhukhan underscores the eternal culture of silence amongst women and society, where violence and pain are always supposed to be curtained behind pretty clothing and adornments. Portraying a bridal party with the central figure of the bride being adored by everyone on her wedding day and their facial features are replaced by sound waves of their screams. The black angel at the bottom is seen with a speech bubble reading 'Shh' as she brings with her the announcement demanding her silence for her future. With each work in the series, the artist either camouflages or bares the screams of the subjugated in these tales. Always breaking the harmonious patterns on the canvas, with their sound waves.

Sadhukhan's works in this series, unfold into elaborate mythical narratives. She layers popular literature and fiction, with cut bangles and torched canvases, her medium of choice, fully cognizant of using her artistic tools to even the planes of fantasy and reality. Here, the artist embodies the spirit of a storyteller and uses the devices of narrative storytelling, one of the oldest forms of mass media to discuss such taboo subjects. As the audience moves from one room to another within the exhibition space, they enter into a mythical land created by the artist. But as the visitors get intimate with each work, they are left asking whether what they see is really a myth or fiction. Because fantasy has never seemed more real than this.

- Siddhi Shailendra



Piyali Sadhukhan (b. Kolkata, 1979) is a mixed media artist, engaging with layers of meaning and memory through the use of found objects in her practice. Her work turns to the individual, as she moves toward the intangible, weathered imaginations of form. She completed her MFA from Kala Bhavana, Visva Bharati University, in 2006. Followed by a Junior Research Fellowship awarded to her by the Government of India in 2007.

Sadhukhan had her solo exhibition *Seeing is (not) Believing* at Akar Prakar, New Delhi curated by Nancy Adajania in 2019. Her chief shows include, “Urban Narratives – a show at Espace Louis Vuitton,” Tokyo in 2012 (works funded by Louis Vuitton), “MODER KONO DESH NAI, MODER KONO DISHA NAI,” at Forum Schlossplatz, Switzerland in 2015, “Boitakkhana project”, at the residence of Prof. R.C. Majumdar, a workshop-based installation project, an initiative by Khoj Kolkata, 2014; 35th-anniversary celebration show organized by Gorky Sadan, 2009; “Entourage De Color,” Birla Academy, 2008. Sponsored by Akar Prakar, Piyali had made headlines with her 25x10x10ft Kaliya installation (a giant 3D installation) on the Indian museum courtyard in 2014. She has participated in various projects including “Designs on Delta-exploring the making of myths”, a workshop based installation project by Khoj Kolkata, 2012; the “Boat project installation” by Khoj Kolkata, 2010 and “Logged” organized by Emami Chisel Art. She received a Junior Research Fellowship from the Government of India in 2007- 2008. She has also participated in many group shows. Her analytical essay, “Surveillance on Humanity”, was published in *Art Etc*, an art magazine by Emami Chisel Art. Over the last 12 years, she has acquired experience as an artistic director and scenographer owing to her engagement with more than 85 Theatre productions.