

[PRESS RELEASE]

The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art invites you to

SMELL ASSEMBLY

Artistic Resesarch by ISHITA DEY and MOHAMMED SAYEED

Curated by Akansha Rastogi

September 7 – October 30, 2019

KNMA, 145 South Court Mall, Saket, New Delhi 110017

The exhibition is part of the series of the exhibitions ‘Young Artists of Our Times’

Kiran Nadar Museum of Art is pleased to present its first series of small exhibitions ‘Young Artists of Our Times’ curated by Akansha Rastogi, Senior Curator, Exhibitions and Programs. The series of exhibitions will unfold from September 2019 to March 2020, exploring different artistries, forms of attentiveness, indulgences and ‘transformational energies’ of youthfulness as a place, which is restless yet lazy, ‘too slow and too fast’, ‘rigorous and uninterested’.

**KNMA commissioned artistic research and project ‘Smells of the City: Scents, Stench and Stink’ by Ishita Dey and Mohammad. Sayeed in 2018 as part of ideation and thinking around museum and the city and urban ecology.** ‘Smell Assembly’ thinks through Dey and Sayeed’s year-long project, and brings together walks, collections and annotations of smells from three sites in the city: Majnu ka Tila, fish markets of Chittaranjan Park, ittr shops and spice market of Old Delhi. The exhibition follows trails of smell-work of Sakha cab drivers, Shahri Mahila Kamgar Union, sanitation workers, smell-workers of Gadodia market, manual scavengers, ittr makers and associated clusters.

According to curator Akansha Rastogi, “Smell Assembly opens an anthropologist’s field diary in a contemporary art museum. It puts into focus the sensorial body as well as a researcher’s body purposefully wandering in the city, a body that maps as well as carries smell, as Ishita Dey and Mohammad Sayeed attempt a phraseology or elaborate on the structure of smells and their naming. The exhibition introduces a *parcha* from a fictional smell-workers union that re-imagines smell as the primary basis of reorganizing work and rate cards, and further invites to play and find one’s own temporary disposition or mizaaj through a smell game. Each collected smell translates into a micro-site with this spatial thinking and processing of research in an exhibitionary form, multiplying or displacing the primary sites of research and transporting viewers to various landscapes and memory-scapes through olfactory experience.”

**Ishita Dey and Mohd. Sayeed’s Note:**

“Smells surround us. Sometimes we can recognize one from the other. But mostly we can’t. A little subtle and they are ignored altogether. A little louder and they become intimidating. People have their own smells. So do houses. Streets too. And the cities, cities are known by their smells – different for different areas and changing with the time of the day and even seasons. But, how much do we know about smells. Do we have enough words to talk about them? Surely we can distinguish some by their names. But most we know through some or other associations. Smell of this or smell of that. As if cultures never thought of having dedicated words for distinct smells. Smells are intimate. They are like whispers, hence the emphasis on subtlety. To let a smell go wild is to shout out a secret in public.

When we know the smells through their associations, often they are material things. We can smell fear. To be at home in a city is to be surrounded by reassuring smells. Can smells express the abstract sense better, giving it a material touch, or whenever we speak of smells we are always speaking of the figurative?

Smells help us to navigate through nooks and corners of every city and Delhi is no different. One of the challenges that city’s planners face is to keep the city smell free. In this context it would be important to remember Delhi’s tryst with closure of industrial units, shift from diesel and petrol run automobiles to compressed natural gas or constant debates on the ever increasing height of city’s landfills. Amidst these debates, what is missing is how smells are felt, expressed through human – non-human interaction.

There are two related questions that we want to explore. First one relates to the representation of smell. If one cannot record a moment of smell, to come back to later or, let’s say to share it with a friend, what are the ways, through which, we remember them or recognize them? Is it possible to translate smells in other mediums–visual, aural, language–in order to understand to what extent the smells have a bearing on contemporary urban life. How do smells represent the metaphorical sense of being in the city and how smells themselves can be represented in search of what is hidden from visual and aural grasp of the city. Secondly, how would an olfactory map of the city look like and how does it express the social? Can social relations be expressed in terms of control over one’s own and surrounding smells? Who has the control over its perpetuation and expression, and who has to live with it and under what condition. How do urban dwellers navigate the inescapable olfactory map of the city?”

**BIOGRAPHIES**

**Dr. Ishita Dey** is an assistant professor at the Department of Sociology, South Asian University. She is a food anthropologist with an interest in food, labour studies and forced migration. She has been working on the life of sweets and sweetness in South Asia with a special focus on West Bengal and Bangladesh and is interested in questions on cultural politics of craftsmanship, food and aesthetic labour. She is interested in questions on hierarchy of senses, relationship of smell, taste and production of aesthetic labour. Apart from that, she is actively invested in cooking and working with community networks questions around indigenous food & food and science. She can be reached at ishita@sau.int

**Mohammad Sayeed** is an urban anthropologist who works on informality, cultural history of Delhi, historical formation of Urdu public and spatial renditions of religion. He also happens to have studied theoretical mathematics and classical Islam. When he is not teaching academic writing at OP Jindal Global University, he is found trailing smells and noises around the city. In his doctoral thesis, he studied the analytic of congestion to understand the precarious complexes that make the contemporary city spaces possible. He is particularly interested in the question how congestion is not just a physical feature but informs the bureaucratic, emotional and spiritual life of the city. Apart from Delhi, he is obsessed with chess and Borges.

**Akansha Rastogi** is Senior Curator of exhibitions and programming at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) in New Delhi. She has served as associate curator of India Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale (2019) and participated in many curatorial residencies. Her research focuses on the history of modern and contemporary Indian art exhibitions, and she is working on a series of essays and a book of interviews. Her recent curatorial projects at KNMA include “Smell Assembly” (2019), “What Place is Kitchen? What Place Community?” (2018); “Hangar for the Passerby” (2017); conversation series “Invitation for a Coup” (2016); “Zones of Contact: Propositions on the Museum” (cocurated with Deeksha Nath and Vidya Shivadas, 2013); and the performance series “Inhabiting the Museum” (2011–2015). She has been an active member of artists-led initiatives, forums, and collectives in Delhi and her additional ‘curatorial-objects’ include “The Souvenir Shop” at Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai (2018); and “Tilting” at School of Environment and Architecture, Mumbai (2018).

