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NATALIE KING & BALA STARR

JITISH KALLAT: CIRCA
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FOREWORD

We live in an interdisciplinary age but old habits die hard. Harder still in a university context where habit can be called tradition and left unaltered and unquestioned. For an artist, on the other hand, habit is anathema, tradition a discourse to be challenged and interdisciplinary experiences the driving force of contemporary culture.

So when Jitish Kallat introduced his cast resin scaffolding, clay street dogs and chirping insects into the Potter, he did more than open a dialogue between his expansive installation practice and an elegant, late-modern museum. He also invited Asialink and the Ian Potter Museum of Art to loosen the structural parameters of a Victorian-era university.

Kallat’s invitation was strikingly physical: the crisp, cubic geometry of the Potter was interrupted by a succession of props (scaffolding), flaws (appliqué ‘cracks’ in walls), intrusions (sleeping dogs) and ruptures (hidden areas revealed through opened doors). All the more striking because the Potter and Asialink occupy similar spaces. Designed by Nonda Katsalides and Robert Nation respectively, the home buildings display the hallmarks of a shared aesthetic that saw the architects united in a joint practice.

Through Kallat’s presence, and that of fellow artists and critics from India, the Potter and Asialink were encouraged to set aside the formal elements of their relationship (institutional, administrative and even architectural structures) in favour of a more dynamic role as cultural entrepreneur. October 2012 saw these two divisions of the university partnered with the Australia India Institute and the Melbourne Festival in the presentation of contemporary Indian art and theory through installation, video, film and a symposium. Collectively, artists, critics and curators issued a call to action: interdisciplinarity is not an abstract policy but a way of working together, in both artistic and institutional culture.

Jitish Kallat’s Circa was part of a more expansive program of Australia–India cultural engagement titled Searching for Lemuria: India 2012 and beyond. Inspired by the mythical lost continent of Lemuria that supposedly once linked Australia and India, this program was based on a research model that searches for ‘common ground’. Key to the program was working in partnership with colleagues at the University of Melbourne. This was a fertile and inherently ‘iterative’ process that mirrored our developing relationships with various Indian partners as the
projects evolved. *Searching for Lemuria* has given us the opportunity to build bridges with colleagues in India, Melbourne and beyond.

We warmly thank the Jitish Kallat Studio, Arndt Berlin and the Keir Foundation along with the Australia India Institute and the Melbourne Festival. A number of collectors kindly lent works for display in the Classics and Archaeology Gallery. The following lenders are gratefully acknowledged: David Adams, Francesco Bottaro, Tony Clifton, Joel Gauvin, Graham Geddes, Dr Don Grant and Olga Sztainbok.

Dr Chris McAuliffe and Lesley Alway

*Director, the Ian Potter Museum of Art (until February 2013)*
*Director, Asialink Arts*
The seventeenth-century scientist and philosopher Blaise Pascal observed that whether we are staring out towards the cosmos, or examining the realm of microscopic reality we are ‘suspended between two infinities’. The further out we look the bigger the horizon. The closer in we reflect the more complex the detail. In both directions there is the experience of the boundless. We have a word to express the experience of infinity: sublime. The concept of sublime is the stumbling block of modern philosophy. The experience of the sublime is a recurring starting point in art. These two worlds have never found a neat point of rendezvous. Theory and practice are not so much suspended at opposite ends of infinity, but seem to oscillate between these polarities at a slight remove from each other. With this limitation in mind I would like to respond to and reflect on the cosmos that appears in the encounter with Jitish Kallat’s exhibition *Circa*.

Let us begin with the tantalizing sense of beginning a journey. Journeys begin in dreams. However, they also take a sharp twist when you cross a threshold and enter a carriage. The thought of a journey stimulates ambivalent arousal because between departure and arrival there is the possibility of an unexpected encounter. There can be a sadness of leaving and a joy in the discovery. Hence, we would prefer to begin our journey with some kind of assurance. I loathe taking travel insurance but I do feel better when the departure point is solid. The passageways of the Ian Potter Museum of Art in which *Circa* is installed are all framed by what appears at first sight as the gawky bamboo poles that are used as scaffolding in Indian construction sites. Upon closer inspection these poles are revealed to be pigmented cast resin and they are held together with steel and rope. The poles also contain elaborately sculpted images of various animals such as monkeys, snakes and birds. In many instances, these creatures are either violently attacking each other or are in a process of devouring their own tails. They conjure mythological scenes, and we also discover that the reference point from which these images were derived is the sculpted façade of the entrance to the main terminus of the Mumbai railway. I wonder how many of the millions of daily commuters notice this allusion to the precarious nature of their journey. Of course, they already know of what we are now belatedly representing.

Journeys follow or create lines. These lines are almost never straight. Rivers
zigzag between the hard and smooth contours of the land. Roads can turn abruptly and railway tracks swerve along a smooth curve. The uneven line is a motif that recurs in this installation. This skinny and sprawling line is a distinct feature of the colonial maps of India on display—the faded and crumpled paper providing an echo to the vain pretense of administrative permanence, the jagged line also appears in the drawings on the vitrines that contain ancient Indian sculptures—generating an illusion of the glass having cracked from pressure. Is the object trying to escape, or the world shattering from external tremors? Finally, the sprawling line is announced in the subtle cracks that surface in tendril-like movement along the pristine plasterwork of the museum’s entrance. These mysterious new cracks are titled Footnote (mirror 1). They are made of acrylic mirrors. They have an alluring effect. Drawing us into a sudden and dark void that disturbs the flat and neutral surface of the museum. Catching the sky and artificial light on its reflective surface they also rebound towards another horizon. The darkness has no bottom, and the light is blindingly open. A footnote is also a belated acknowledgement of what you already know. It traces back the origin of the journey of discovery that you have just completed.

The installation also contains another suite of sculptures that are interspersed across the museum’s polished wooden floorboards. The sculptures are of sleeping dogs. Climbing out of their backs are the sprouts of wheat. Again the object and its location are in stark tension. The dogs are life-size and life-like. They are more familiar as companions to the homeless than they are as occupants of the contemplative corners of a museum. The sprouting of wheat seeds from within the unfired clay volume of the sculpture is in itself an uncanny experience. How does wheat live and grow from such dead matter? However, what is most pertinent about these sculptures that are collectively referred as Prosody of a pulse rate is their conception in a spherical state of repose. These dogs are in a state of suspension, between exhaustion and rejuvenation. Sleep is a kind of rebirth. The dogs have surrendered into the surface of the earth. We would prefer to imagine that the ground is dusty and warm, rather than shiny and hard. Nevertheless they surrender their muscular frame to a soft womb-like shape and allow the dynamic tension of the daily trot between hither and thither to realign itself into a rhythmic pattern of in- and exhalation. The image of an animal asleep in spherical union, once prefaced
with a title that alerts us to the poetic techniques of harmony, also exposes us to another mystic sign: the function of breath in the cosmic soul.

Finally, I want to turn my attention to Jitish Kallat’s video piece: Forensic trail of a grand banquet. The screens face each other. One contains footage of 700 food items that have been X-rayed. The other screen plays the footage in reverse. Natalie King has perceptively described the effect of viewing this work as pulling us into a ‘meteoric vortex’. Jitish Kallat has also informed us that: ‘the microscopic organisms, nebulae, or underwater formations that you see flying around you, are actually an X-ray of food items like samosas, kachoris, corn, etc., touching upon the need for sustenance, once again. The concept of the banquet uploaded into the cosmos is quite bizarre in itself. It’s how you choose to look at it’. 

This gesture of choice of perspective by the artist is also a profound expression of conceptual understatement. I am not suggesting that this gesture is made in the spirit of false modesty or motivated by indecision and insecurity. On the contrary, like all the claims that Jitish Kallat makes, this one is marked by a deliberative tone. To not overstate or prescribe the precise perspective is to acknowledge a space that has an autonomy that is beyond the artist’s reach. To understate the position or extent to which a viewer ‘chooses to look’ is both a necessary precaution and a concession to an experience that exceeds human cognition. It carefully avoids an absurd level of self-confidence. It also acknowledges the incontrovertible freedom of the viewer. But what sort of freedom do we have before this image of the universe that is out there and within the video of the most minute...

Catalogue 4
Forensic trail of a grand banquet, 2009
form of life? At one level when we are in the midst of this double infinity there is no choice. Such a process of decision-making has either already evaporated as it has been assimilated into the cosmic ether, or else the faculty for reasoning has conceded that it has been annihilated in the encounter with the sublime. The vortex sucks in all chunks and disperses the minutest levels of thought. The microscopic details of food and the most macro-ecology of the cosmos become indistinguishable. The simulation of one by the other has been a point of fascination that endures from the most ancient cosmologies to the most recent endeavours by physicists like Stephen Hawking. The images generated by the ancient philosopher and the visualizations made possible by contemporary scientists are connected not just by the illusionistic distortions that are made possible with the most sophisticated camera lens, but also by a persistent belief that the geometric laws that align the part with the whole are valid principles for understanding the origin of the cosmos and the dynamic tension that sustains life and death.

The combination of a forensic and spherical perspective is in my view an affirmation of a new and radical anthropocentric view of the cosmos. It looks into the most minute details of everyday things such as the food that generates life and not only finds an image of the cosmos, but also demonstrates a companionship between humanity and the widest spheres of our environment. It is one thing to try and make sense of the mystery of cosmic infinity by staring into the most microscopic details and finding a form that makes the incomprehensible slightly more comprehensible. However,
Catalogue 7
*Prosody of a pulse rate*, 2012

Catalogue 31
Sandstone statue of a seated Buddha surrounded by pillared arch
India, c. 3rd-5th century CE
beyond this neat and comforting illusion is another level of recognition of responsibility. The energy that is out there is also in here. Food, intelligence and the cosmos may all have a common form. The energy that is out there is also in here. Food, intelligence and the cosmos may all have a common form. The point of putting two video screens to face each other and for one screen to reverse the footage is not confined to a principle of doubling. It also invites the viewer to stand in the middle and bear witness to the circumambient flows. It is my general contention that the principle of creativity is intricately interwoven with the affirmative ideas of cosmos. How could I ever prove this?

Let us start with this primary capacity for seeing, sensing and imagining the world. When we look out at the world there is the horizon. The land bends away because it is part of a sphere and the skies open like a boundless screen. At no stage is anything like the whole ever visible. One part of the surface of the world hides another, and at any point the vast bulk is always beyond our range of vision. The world as a whole is always hidden from any direct view. Our eyes always look up as much as they look out and across. Looking up we gain a vertical view as the cone of vision extends to the infinite depth of the cosmic screen. This gaze exposes us to far more than we can comprehend. This luminous darkness and sparkling murkiness inspire both dreadful awe and uplifting wonder.

In Jitish Kallat’s work we see this anthropocentric act of projection. It begins in the cosmology of small symbols. It conjures the dazzling uncertainty in the line of any journey, finding form in the life-sprouting rhythm of a dog’s sleeping breath. Diogenes the Cynic, who famously rejected Alexander the Great’s offer of wealth and power, and whose name comes from his ambition to live in a state that could match a dog’s cosmic harmony, would be proud to have made such an understatement.

Dr. Nikos Papastergiadis

Dr. Nikos Papastergiadis is a professor at the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne. His most recent book is ‘Cosmopolitanism and culture’ (2012).

AN EVOLVING NARRATIVE IN 8 ACTS

PROLOGUE
Katherine Boo’s wondrous and vivid narration of a slum, Annawadi, near Mumbai airport in the shadow of luxury hotels is a microcosm of India’s prosperity and poverty: See the flames engulfing a disabled woman in a pink-flowered tunic shrink to nothing but a matchbook on the floor. See Fatima minutes earlier, dancing on crutches to a raucous love song, her delicate features unscathed. Keep rewinding, back seven months more, and stop at an ordinary day in January 2008. It was about as hopeful a season as there had ever been in the years since a bitty slum popped up in the biggest city of a country that holds one-third of the planet’s poor. A country dizzy now with development and circulating money.1

Mumbai-based artist Jitish Kallat deploys charred text and rewinding time as central leitmotifs in his first solo exhibition in an Australian museum. Conceived as an open-ended narrative, a linguistic trope or half-sentence, Kallat’s foray awaits completion. Multiple interventions that respond to the topography and unique character of the Ian Potter Museum of Art allude to impermanence, contingency and change. Here is a calligraphy of meanings with landing sites across the museum including activating the double height, soaring atrium and various interstitial, overlooked spaces.

Circa references both a tentative moment in time, an approximation of date and a momentous sculpture of bamboo scaffolding that infiltrates the Ian Potter Museum of Art. Kallat deftly constructs a sculptural conversation within the museum in order to explore notions of duration, restoration and evoke unexplained narratives. Like an evolving drawing, one possibility speaks to another manifested in different forms. Dispersed across the museum, there is limited visual resemblance yet collectively Kallat has created an ambient series of props and prompts, inviting us to openly interpret and interact. By sculpting out scenarios, artworks converse, some appear for a few days while others remain on display for the six-month duration of the exhibition. Yet others await conception when the departure of interventions makes space for them as part of an evolving entry and exit of ideas: Chance, contingency and contagion each play a key role in the development of this shape-shifting project. One utterance infects another so that procreating possibilities give rise to a tentative, evolving, dispersed and inconclusive oration in several parts of the museum.2
The process of realisation involved Kallat’s virtual inhabitation of the museum over a period of seven months including one site visit to Melbourne. Extensive conversations unfolded between Kallat and co-curators Bala Starr, Andrew Jamieson and myself. Working across time zones, we conversed and collaborated sending copious emails and relaying our responses and interpretations while collectively imagining possibilities. Time evolved as a recurrent theme moving away from a static exhibition to a slow absorption of time and space. Some of Kallat’s imaginings were realised yet others remain dormant. The museum as a controlling and vigilant environment, ruled by procedures, became a pathway for deviation and intervention.

**ACT 1: Ouroboros**

On the museum façade after dark, a buffering symbol rotates on the shiny surface of the building. A familiar motif of waiting for a download to complete, this gesture has an associative range that includes transiting, pending, and pausing. Kallat’s nocturnal projection is suspenseful. The title, Ouroboros, further imbues a self-reflexivity or cyclicality within the ancient symbol of a serpent or dragon eating its own tail. Alchemical and circular, this creature encapsulates both sustenance and swallowing while embodying ravenousness and renewal. By holding time, this looped buffering animation is a liminal motif presented for two weeks during the Melbourne Festival in October 2012.

**ACT 2: Circa**

First exhibited at one of the oldest museums in Mumbai, the Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Kallat’s mammoth sculpture comprises 120 scaffolding poles cast in pigmented resin and steel. Inscribed with a script or scripture of animals devouring each other, monkeys, snakes, owls and fish are set in relief. Bound, propped and wedged within the galleries, it is as if the museum is in a state of flux. The relief figures are derived from images in the main

Catalogue 6
Ouroboros, 2012
terminus in Mumbai where two million people pass through daily. The sheer volume of passengers traversing the Victoria Terminus recalls Elias Canetti’s meditation on the throng of crowds who transit, enter, exit, travel and journey. Canetti attributes density and rhythm to crowds as reflective of the human condition for:

*it is only in a crowd that man can become free of this fear of being touched. This is the only situation in which fear changes into its opposite. The crowd he needs is the dense crowd, in which body is pressed to body; a crowd, too, whose physical constitution is also dense, or compact ...*[^3]

*Circa* resembles bamboo and stitches itself across the museum from the entrance to stairwells, landings and up to the Classics and Archaeology Gallery. Adorned with recurrent images of an animal trying to eat, often devouring another creature, survival and sustenance is embedded in this sculpture. Suggestive of the cycle of life, *Circa* also alludes to transformation and building restoration through its appearance as scaffolding. Festooned throughout the museum, this sculptural trail eventually envelops the stone antiquities within the Classics and Archaeology Gallery. Finally, the scaffolding provides a vista into the museum storage facility, opening up the heart of the museum to visitors, providing a glimpse into a hidden interior.[^4]

**ACT 3: FOOTNOTE (MIRROR 1)**

A series of cracks rendered in thin mirrors appears on the main wall in the entrance to the museum. Like a footnote or postscript, these fissures reflect the building back onto itself by reorientating visual and perspectival possibilities. Reminiscent of crevices, mirrored...
arteries visually resemble the filigree markings on maps of India displayed in the Classics and Archaeology Gallery. Kallat’s wall fissures allow the building to become self-reflexive while the title furthers ongoing linguistic associations.

**ACT 4: FOUND BURNT TEXT**
For some time, Kallat has carried around a found text awaiting formation. Now, he has burnt this narrative with adhesive onto the gallery wall leaving a charred imprint. Recursive with an internal, temporal paradox, the text skips tenses whereby past, present and future are conflated: *A man travels back in time to discover the cause of a famous fire. While in the building where the fire started he accidentally knocks over a kerosene lantern and causes a fire, the same fire that would inspire him years later to travel back in time.*

The journey is both physical and metaphysical. Travelling back in time, the inferno and incineration allude to immolation, funeral pyres, danger and renewal. The almost indecipherable text appears as a fragile charcoal drawing whereby speech materialises. Moreover, fire is forbidden within museum confines yet Kallat has left a charred residue on the gallery wall.²

**ACT 5: FORENSIC TRAIL OF THE GRAND BANQUET**
Kallat X-rayed 700 food items in a medical facility and had them digitally transformed into a celestial galaxy. Two videos face each other, one played out in reverse, drawing the viewer into a meteoric vortex. Sustenance and nutrition are played out in this witty banquet of orbiting shapes: *the microscopic organisms, nebulae, or underwater formations that you see flying around you, are actually an X-ray of food*
items like samosas, kachoris, corn, etc., touching upon the need for sustenance, once again. The concept of a banquet uploaded into the cosmos is quite bizarre in itself. It’s how you choose to look at it.  

**ACT 6: PROSODY OF A PULSE RATE**  
Kallat and his assistant produced a suite of life-size sleeping dogs with sprouting seeds embedded in their contours. The impermanence of unfired clay is rendered porous and textured. In different states of repose, these somnolent street dogs are part-animal part-landscape inscribed with verdant wheat. A sculpted, living organism is preserved within the museum. The title includes ‘prosody’ continuing Kallat’s linguistic intonation of speech and utterance while sleep induces a slower pulse rate. These dogs have found refuge within the museum in a remarkably tender gesture for discarded animals whose existence is about survival. We are also reminded of the adage: let sleeping dogs lie.

**ACT 7: FOOTNOTE (MIRROR 2)**  
Between the brick 1920s architecture of the Classics and Archaeology Gallery and the abutting contemporary wing, Kallat has placed a row of mirrors like a recursive corridor. Once again the museum reflects back on itself so that the contemporary segues with the classical. For Kallat, these non-spaces between galleries resonate with possibilities. By activating peripheral
and threshold zones, Kallat’s mirrored corridor of infinity holds innumerable reflections and viewpoints.

ACT 8: UNTITLED
Kallat has drawn fine cracks on vitrines within the Classics and Archaeology Gallery’s display of ancient Indian carved stone antiquities as if there has been an act of violence or cryptic happening. These mysterious tendrils resemble tributaries that appear in the colonial-era maps of India that Kallat has sourced from the University of Melbourne’s map collection. Cartographic capillaries have a visual resonance with Kallat’s delicately drawn shards. An accompanying soundscape of crickets singing animates the gallery with the shrill outdoors. Crickets are nocturnal insects and it is only the male cricket that chirps by rubbing his wings together. This acoustic soundscape is an aural backdrop to the nineteenth-century maps with borders and terrain that have since shifted. Kallat has opened up the storage facility at the gallery core with components of Circa infiltrating the open door to expose hidden objects. We are drawn into the museum’s dark interior.

EPILOGUE
Over six months, Jitish Kallat occupies the museum with sculptural iterations that reflect on time and duration. By suturing various inhabitations within the museum, Kallat deflects and reorients our experience to induce both playfulness and poeticism.

Natalie King
Natalie King is a curator, writer and the inaugural director of Utopia@Asialink, a pan-Asian incubator.
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On 18 March 2013 at 11:30am, an exchange of emails commenced between Bala Starr, senior curator at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, writing from Melbourne; Jitish Kallat, corresponding from his home and studio in Mumbai with interim travel to Basel; Andrew Jamieson, curator, Classics and Archaeology Gallery, University of Melbourne, writing from his office in Melbourne; Chaitanya Sambrani, art historian, curator, and senior lecturer in art theory at the Australian National University, corresponding from Canberra and en route to Brisbane; Natalie King, director, Utopia@Asialink, University of Melbourne, writing from Melbourne, Mildura and the coastal town of Somers; David Elliott, a Manchester-born museum director, curator and writer who has run institutions and worked on major projects in Oxford, Stockholm, Tokyo, Istanbul, Sydney, Hong Kong and Kiev, writing from Berlin having just returned from Warsaw. The conversation culminated on Thursday 4 April at 10:00pm.

Bala Starr: As I understand it, Jitish, the scaffolding work Circa was made without an exhibition opportunity in mind, in an experimental process of construction and design in your studio over some months in 2010–11. Its first site-specific installation was as part of Fieldnotes: tomorrow was here yesterday at the Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum in Mumbai in 2011. I saw the second installation in New Delhi that addressed the entrance architecture of Lalit Kala Akademi as part of the Skoda Prize exhibition in early 2012. The Ian Potter Museum of Art exhibition, itself titled Circa, was the third public manifestation, and at the time of writing, you are preparing for Circa’s presentation at Art Basel in Hong Kong as part of the Encounters section. From the images we’ve seen, this—together with its site—will provide an entirely different experience of Circa.

During the planning of the installation of Circa at the Potter you described your detailed thinking about the site as a ‘virtual inhabitation’ of our museum building, using the experience of a brief first visit, diagrams, plans, digital images and information about its history. Yours is a flexible and functional way of working, but also philosophical. Could you tell us when you first became conscious of working with buildings in this way? How do you think through the installation of a work of art in relation to the information a site communicates to you?

Jitish Kallat: A building is a repository of stories and we involuntarily decode spatial energies, which manifest as our
tangible experience. Having once visited the Potter I started to remotely reside in the space. I could perhaps say that the show was an accumulation of reflex-gestures crystallized as works in the exhibition. Thus the show evolved in an unstructured and unpredictable manner, taking diverse forms and activating transitory spaces in the museum and its external façade, not so much the regular exhibition walls. With Footnote (mirror 1), the atrium walls appear to be cracked as if an aging structure was developing fissures. On closer viewing these fissures are a web-work of cut mirrors pinned onto the museum walls, reflecting the present moment and interacting with the multilevel Circa installation. In Footnote (mirror 2), two sets of mirrors reflect each other into infinity, interspersed with manifold reflections of the Classics and Archaeology Gallery and the adjoining contemporary gallery and sewing together the disparate tenors of these spaces with mirror images of each other forming endless recursions.

In the case of Public notice 3 (2010–11) at the Art Institute of Chicago, the piece evoked the historical memory of the World’s Parliament of Religions, which took place in that very museum building on 11 September 1893 and overlaid this with the contrasting occurrences of 11 September 2001. At the Potter, the show began to evolve as Circa entered the doorway of the heavily guarded art storage of the Classics and Archaeology Gallery where ancient artefacts hibernate in darkness for years before they make brief appearances as exhibits. Once this door was left open the exhibition developed through a cascade of related triggers.

Andrew Jamieson: Prior to his visit to Australia, we sent for Jitish’s consideration a list of Indian works represented in the University of Melbourne’s cultural collections. The list included carved stone sculptures, archaeological pottery collections, ancient manuscripts, bronze ritual objects, paintings and historical maps. These works began a conversation that continued to evolve when Jitish arrived at the Potter in August 2012. During his initial visit, we toured the Classics and Archaeology Gallery and the antiquities storage repository located at the centre of the gallery. It was from this point onwards that we started discussing the idea of using the Circa scaffolding to invade the threshold—separating gallery from repository and forcing the storeroom door open to permit glimpses into another world.
As the project developed, attention focused around a group of carved stone objects produced in the Greco-Buddhist style which developed out of a merger of Greek, Syrian, Persian and Indian artistic influences. It was these sculptures and reliefs from the university’s collection, along with key works from several Melbourne private collections, and six colonial-era maps showing the vastness and terrain of India that made up the final group of works displayed with Jitish’s interventions in the Classics and Archaeology Gallery. Conspiracy was a recurring theme in many of our conversations. For me, the scaffolding of Circa, the soundscape of crickets chirping, the fine cracks on the vitrines suggesting fractured glass, and the sleeping dogs, reference different threads in this theme.

Chaitanya Sambrani: Having seen the first and third manifestations of Circa in person, I am struck by how malleable this structure is. It is indeed a structure not so much of resin rods and jute rope, as it is an armature of thought that relates to different kinds of history and politics, from modern to postmodern, and from Third World critique to contemporary globalized cosmopolitan adventure. This is not to discount previous iterations of cosmopolitanism, or of globalism. Indeed, as selections from the Melbourne University collections chosen for display in conjunction with Jitish’s intervention show, such adventure was implicit in the making of Gandhara sculpture, which fuses, as Andrew says, elements of Greco-Roman, Persian and Indian styles among others. The Indian subcontinent has absorbed and profited from these influences. Armatures invite inhabitation. They gesture to the empty spaces that the rectilinear elements subtend, extending the enclosed domain to imaginative infill. Scaffoldings never commit themselves wholly to the erection of smooth-faced and right-angled walls. The volume described is, at least potentially, indeterminate.

In India though, these same armatures invite comparisons with unsecured labourers suspended way above safe heights, plastering, painting, or installing banners on properties that can never figure in their ambit of possession. Class and caste are implicit in working on scaffolding. What then of people who worked on Victoria Terminus in colonial Bombay, or others since?

Then, also, is the question of the nineteenth-century British enthusiasm for the ‘Gothick’ and how this came to
be absorbed into/implemented within the ‘Indo-Saracenic’ architecture of colonial Bombay. Jitish clearly makes reference to this in his faux-bamboo armature that can invade, fungus-like, the skin of all sorts of buildings, ranging from the neoclassicism of the Bhau Daji Lad Museum in Bombay to the brutal modernism of the Potter in Melbourne. We are reminded of the labour of anonymous workers who, under the direction of architectural dreamers, erected such edifices.

Jitish is astute in opening up the edifice to other kinds of scrutiny. I say ‘other kinds’ because his ‘cracks’ in the wall are mirrored, as are his fractures in the glass surrounding that which is deemed precious. Scrutinizers are likely to find themselves reflected as objects of attention, and that too, in the same fragmented vision as that with which they behold their chosen object.

**Natalie King**: I agree with you, Chaitanya, that as scrutinizers we might find ourselves peering into reflective cracks or glancing at ourselves in a row of mirrors embedded in the aperture between the old and new buildings, ushering us into the Classics and Archaeology Gallery. But these cracks are capacious, returning us to architectural imperfections while firmly positioning the viewer amidst the work. *Circa*, like our conversation, is redolent with divergences, forays and meanderings across time and space, architecture and site. This agility and malleability that is interwoven within *Circa* is perhaps akin to the threads of jute that bind the scaffolding poles. Cracks also recur as visual motifs in tributaries in the nineteenth-century maps of India that are encased in vitrines. Here we are reminded of shifting borders, landscapes and journeys. Clearly, cracks open up numerous possibilities within the museum.

*Circa* also comprises detours that were imagined yet not realised. For example, at one point, we discussed incorporating in the museum natural beehives that comprise giant yet delicate folds of honeycomb in the form of suspended, pendulous sacks (reminiscent of Claes Oldenberg or Eva Hesse). The associative range of the beehive includes housing, shelter, habitation and a colony of workers or labourers. These natural structures are rare and disintegrate when relocated from their habitat so we were unable to incorporate them into *Circa*. In their place, a celestial galaxy of orbiting food items that were X-rayed by Jitish appeared in the form of a dual
projection drawing us into a vortex of shapes.

While Jitish was conceptualising Circa for the Potter, he also conceived of a new public sculpture at an intersection on the outskirts of Vienna. Road signage was deployed in a sculptural formation of directionless folds, arrows pointing to nowhere. I couldn't help but think about Deleuze’s late essay ‘Le pli’ which translates as ‘the fold’. Deleuze ruminates on the fold as a formation of space and time that embodies the dynamics of flux. Time is folded, bent and enveloped with space in the same way that Jitish’s public sculpture loops back on itself, confounding orientation. Jitish, let’s discuss notions of time and duration within your sculptural forms.

**Jitish:** Time when undivided is seamless and intangible; we domesticate it with markers and pollute it with numbers as a way of giving ourselves a sense of orientation. Ironically, Natalie, in our desire to concretize time and hold it captive as ‘duration’, we end up living in a disoriented discord with the unfolding rhythms of the present moment.

The idea of time continues to recur through a lot of my work, either in the form of the endless loop as in the case of the new permanent sculpture in Austria that you mentioned, or in pieces such as Epilogue where my father’s lifetime was recited through the 22,000 moons that he saw being replaced by that many rotis. Occasionally in my work, time is marked by historically potent dates and their reincarnations; at other times, in projects such as Circa at the Potter or Fieldnotes at the Bhau Daji Lad Museum in Mumbai, the idea of time is diffused through multilayered evocations or even by energizing a sightline within the museum through an intervention. With reference to time within the Circa exhibition, I’d like to point to the video projection of a buffering sign on the museum façade, which came on once the museum shut for the night. Titled Ouroboros, this circle of illuminated dots curls back and forth from darkness to light to darkness again, as if downloading and holding forth a promise of the emergent present.

**David Elliott:** The idea of ‘circular’ or looped time is certainly of relevance to artistic production outside Asia yet it is often minimised by the vestigial spectre of progress on which capitalism and other forms of consumerism have to feed. Because the perception of time within the great Asian religions is essentially cyclical, we are invited to perceive continuing ethical threads over
periods much longer than the human life. Within the Western view, context is paramount and tends to drive everything else out and, as the cyclical approach is not dialectical, it was regarded as ‘anti-modern’. Yet such categorizations are meaningless. We have always been affected by both circumstance and the actions we take and I think that in your political works, Jitish, you highlight the paradox of selflessness that in order to achieve a clear idea of self you have to be able to perceive it on a more cosmic scale. This idea is elaborated in those works in which you have used the words of Mahatma Gandhi as collective portals for self-realization. Pairing Eastern and Western attitudes to time and fate is necessary in order to see both the analogies and the differences between, say, Sartre’s idea of le néant (the void) and the Buddhist concept of emptiness (voiding). The one being desperately rooted in the self as the only touchstone of existence, the other realizing that momentary definitions of self are illusions that can only be exorcised within a much longer continuum. Considerations of this kind were at the back of my mind in relation to **Covering letter**, the work you realized for the 1st Kiev International Biennale of Contemporary Art in 2012. The projection of the letter sent by Gandhi to Adolf Hitler on the eve of World War II urging him to pull back from his decided course of action would be little more than a historical curiosity did it not speak strongly to the present about the courses of action open to us as well as about many countries’ political and economic reliance on the proliferation of arms.

**Jitish:** Thanks so much David. Gandhi’s words addressed to Hitler seem like a haiku that can be read, interpreted and traversed by any recipient as if it were addressed to anyone. And yet, it holds its intent tightly within the wrap of ambivalence, and the perplexity that some may feel on seeing that Gandhi, despite all the brutality, greets Hitler as a friend. When one passes the film of fog that forms the illuminated letter from Gandhi, one inhabits the words from the world’s greatest proponent of peace to perhaps the most violent individual of his time. And yet, like all of Gandhi’s gestures and his life experiments, this piece of correspondence seems like an open letter destined to travel beyond its delivery date and intended recipient. It seems like a letter written to anyone, anytime, anywhere, by dispatching, as Gandhi puts it, ‘an appeal for whatever it may be worth’ as if a subtle intention was conveyed for retransmission through ‘the void’.
Chaitanya: Jitish has returned over and over to textual fragments from modern Indian history: Vivekananda, Gandhi, Nehru. These texts, whether as ‘public notices’ or ‘private’ epistles, are deeply enmeshed in the temporal moments and political momentum of their occasion, always with a sting in the tail. We are over and again reminded of the parallels our times might have with those past. In other words, we are encouraged to see how little we have learned. In a way, Jitish’s re-invocations invite us to consider other kinds of temporality, and different ethics of ‘being in time’, insisting evermore that we take up the Althusserian exhortation to ‘think otherwise’. I would like to see Jitish’s return to these texts as a response to the colonization of time itself. As Olu Oguibe reminds us, ‘If Time is a colony, then nothing is free’. The regulation and domestication of time is a key technology of colonization and other forms of capitalist domination. Through its title as well as physical manifestation, Circa gestures to an unsteady temporality, presumably one that could be open to contestation and counter-claims. Cyclical and dialectical constructions of time are equally subject to examination through the installation that bridges chronological constructions of time between what we classify as the ‘modern’ and the ‘ancient’ in terms of the Ian Potter Museum of Art’s galleries. And in the midst of this is the delectation we are offered in letting ‘sleeping (watch-) dogs lie’ as the forms of these somnolent keepers of temporal alleyways gradually give rise to a series of little forests without destiny.

Natalie: Throughout our conversation, the cycle of time, duration and temporality recur. Let us revisit Jitish’s slowly rotating, hypnotic buffering sign in Ouroboros. Projected onto the façade of the Potter at night for two weeks, this nocturnal, circular motif suggested waiting, pausing, pending and halting. In our harried, networked world, time is suspended. Western notions of time are based on an incremental, clock-and-calendar time; ordered, linear and sequential as well as a form of colonizer, as discussed by Chaitanya. Time, however, implodes in the cosmic spinning of shapes in Jitish’s dual video projection Forensic trail of a grand banquet. Miniature, orbiting forms within the immensity of a galaxy present us with a dialectic of time. Jitish deftly sculpts time through the various incarnations of Circa. In doing so, Jitish, you take us back to Bachelard’s views of time as entwined with imagination and dreaming, invoking a phenomenology of the soul.
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Catalogue 24
Sandstone carving of a celestial dancer adorned with jewels and wearing a beaded girdle Rajasthan, India, c. 13th century CE
Jitish Kallat was born in Mumbai in 1974. In 1996, after receiving a Bachelor of Fine Art degree (in painting) at Sir JJ School of Art, Mumbai, Kallat was awarded a year-long fellowship at his alma mater. In 1997, Gallery Chemould (Mumbai) presented his first solo exhibition, *P.T.O*.

From the start, Kallat’s art drew upon life in Mumbai, reflecting its many complexities, juxtapositions and layered realities. He interpreted city life in dynamic imagery, filtering aspects of urban experience into oblique self-portraits. In early works, the self was presented simultaneously as a consignee of experience, a keeper of cryptic diaries, an interpreter and interrogator. Often, found items such as newspaper or magazine clippings were photocopied or altered as fragments of data in large-scale paintings that reflect transformational change within the shifting metropolis or nation. Kallat explored themes of time, transience, sustenance and survival, and these have continued to inform his practice.

Kallat works with a variety of media including painting, video, photography, sculpture, and text-based installation. His visual language is often interpreted as a poetic chronicle of the cycle of life in India, a rapidly changing nation which has become associated with economic growth, technological innovation and progress, marked by widespread inequity. Kallat’s evocative imagery is a layered testimonial to this incongruity.

By the turn of the millennium, Kallat had held a series of prestigious international solo exhibitions. His wide-ranging repertoire includes autobiographical, art-historical, religious and political references that evoke multiple meanings and strong visceral responses.

Over the last decade, Kallat has worked with text-based installations that reference important historical speeches. In the aftermath of the communal riots in Gujarat, for example, the installation *Public notice*, at the National Gallery of Modern Art (Mumbai), referred to Jawaharlal Nehru’s midnight speech on 14 August 1947, when India announced independence after two centuries of British rule. The text of Nehru’s speech, which Nehru delivered against a backdrop of riots and the bloodshed of the partition, was burnt by Kallat onto mirrors that were warped by the heat of the act of burning. In *Lie of the land*, an exhibition at Walsh Gallery (Chicago) in 2004, Kallat presented mixed-media works drawn from print media and television news broadcasts.
He has described his evocative tapestry of imagery as ‘letting the brimful pop billboard and the fierce economy of agitprop posters come together in a single picture’.

In the series *Rickshawpolis*, 2005, Kallat turned his attention to the urban environment and street imagery in large panoramic photographic installations such as *Artist making local call* and *Onomatopoeia (the scar park)*. In *365 lives*, 2007, a room-size installation presented at Arario Gallery (Beijing) and ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art (Karlsruhe), Kallat compiled 365 photographs of dented automobiles. Reminiscent of colour swatches, they seemed like an inventory of wounds. It is as if Kallat had aimed to create a seismographic record of the city’s erratic heartbeat through an image about collision. In *Universal recipient*, 2008, Kallat’s solo exhibition at Haunch of Venison (Zürich), he exhibited the 7-metre long sculptural work *Aquasaurus*, a life-size re-creation of a water tanker. Made of sculptured bones, *Aquasaurus* morphs a vehicle and a prehistoric vertebrate from a natural history museum. Kallat suggests that it may also be an ‘oversized toy in a child’s dream’.

On 11 September 2010, Kallat presented his landmark solo exhibition *Public notice 3* at the Art Institute of Chicago. This site-specific work brought together two events: the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon which occurred on 11 September 2001, and the first World’s Parliament of Religions which took place on 11 September 1893 in the Art Institute of Chicago building. Remarkably, the World’s Parliament of Religions included a speech by Swami Vivekananda that promoted religious tolerance and an end to fanaticism and persecution. Kallat made the speech central to his installation.

In *Fieldnotes: tomorrow was here yesterday*, 2011, Kallat turned his attention to the history and architecture of the Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum (Mumbai), one of the oldest museums in India. Architecture is another theme of interest which he also explores in *Circa*, 2012–13, through experimental and experiential interventions across several spaces within the Ian Potter Museum of Art. In line with the reflective nature of his recent projects, this exhibition is conceived as an evolving narrative that is subject to change during the course of the show.
Continuing his engagement with historical events, Kallat’s most recent installation, Covering letter, 2012, refers to a letter written by Mahatma Gandhi to Adolf Hitler in 1939, urging him to reconsider his violent plans. Kallat beamed the Ghandhi quotation onto a curtain of traversable dry fog. Describing the note as a ‘haiku’, and a plea ‘from a great advocate of peace to possibly one of the most violent individuals that ever lived’, the open letter becomes, for Kallat, an opportunity for self-reflection. While the imagery and thematic focus of Kallat’s work can be traced to his upbringing and place of residence in India, the conceptual and linguistic range of his practice is truly transcultural.

Jitish Kallat has participated in important international exhibitions including the 1st Kiev International Biennale of Contemporary Art (Ukraine, 2012); Art Unlimited, Art Basel (Switzerland, 2012); Watercolour, Tate Britain (2011); Chalo! India: a new era of Indian art, Essl Museum (Vienna, 2009); India contemporary, Gemeentemuseum (the Hague, the Netherlands, 2009); 3rd Guangzhou Triennial (China, 2008); Thermoctrine of art. New Asian waves, ZKM Museum of Contemporary Art (Karlsruhe, Germany, 2007); Horn please, Kunstmuseum Bern (Switzerland, 2007); 6th Gwangju Biennale (Korea, 2006); 5th Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art (Brisbane, 2006); Century city, Tate Modern (2001); Indian painting, Art Gallery of New South Wales (Sydney, 2001); 7th Havana Biennial (Cuba, 2000); and 1st Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (Japan, 1999).

Recent solo exhibitions include: Circa, the Ian Potter Museum of Art (Melbourne, 2012); Chlorophyll park, Nature Morte (New Delhi, 2012); Fieldnotes: tomorrow was here yesterday, Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum (Mumbai, 2011); Public notice 3, Art Institute of Chicago (2010); Aquasaurus, Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (Sydney, 2008); Skinside outside, Arario Gallery (Seoul, 2008); Public notice 2, Bodhi Art (Singapore, 2008); Universal recipient, Haunch of Venison (Zürich, 2008); Unclaimed baggage, Albion (London, 2007); 365 lives, Arario Gallery (Beijing, 2007); Gallery Barry Keldoulis (Sydney, 2006); Rickshawpolis I, Nature Morte (New Delhi, 2005); and Humiliation tax, Gallery Chemould (Mumbai, 2005), among others.
Kallat’s work has been acquired for important public and private collections including the National Gallery of Modern Art (New Delhi), Art Institute of Chicago, Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), Brooklyn Museum (New York), Singapore Art Museum, Birmingham Museum and the New Art Gallery (Walsall, UK), Art Foundation Mallorca (Spain), Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (Sydney), Fukuoka Asian Art Museum (Japan), Saatchi Collection (London), Initial Access—the Frank Cohen Collection (Wolverhampton, UK), Devi Art Foundation (New Delhi), Vanhaerents Art Collection (Brussels), Sigg Collection (Switzerland), Arario Gallery (Seoul), Burger Collection (Hong Kong and Berlin), Guy & Myriam Ullens Foundation (Geneva), Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (New Delhi), and others.

Jitish Kallat is represented by Chemould Prescott Road (Mumbai), Arario Gallery (Beijing and Seoul), Nature Morte (New Delhi), and Arndt (Berlin).

Dr Donna Leslie
*Vizard Foundation Assistant Curator, the Ian Potter Museum of Art.*

**Further reading**


www.gallerychemould.com
www.arariogallery.co.kr
www.naturemorte.com
www.arndtberlin.com
CATALOGUE OF WORKS

Jitish Kallat
born Mumbai 1974, lives Mumbai

Various locations at the Ian Potter Museum of Art including entrance and atrium, façade and landings
Except where otherwise noted, all works courtesy Jitish Kallat Studio

1. Circa, 2011
pigmented cast resin, steel, rope
Courtesy Jitish Kallat Studio and Arndt Berlin

2. Footnote (mirror 1), 2012
acrylic mirror, pins

3. Footnote (mirror 2), 2012
glass mirror, wood

4. Forensic trail of a grand banquet, 2009
single-channel HD video on two screens
black & white, silent, 2:18 minutes

5. Found burnt text, 2012
burnt adhesive

6. Ouroboros, 2012
single-channel HD video
black & white, silent, 1:57 minutes

7. Prosody of a pulse rate, 2012
unfired stoneware, wheat grain

8. Untitled, 2012
wax pencil on museum vitrines

9. Untitled (cricket chirping), 2012
low-volume sound

Classics and Archaeology Gallery
Except where otherwise noted, all works courtesy private collections, Melbourne

10. Black stone relief of Hindu god Agni (Vedic god of fire and sacrifices) holding a water pot Central India, c. 12th century CE
The University of Melbourne Art Collection. David and Marion Adams Collection

11. Glazed earthenware fertility icon with female figure Rajasthan, India, c. 3rd-5th century CE

12. Grey schist carving depicting Siddharta (the Buddha) on horse-back flanked by attendants Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, c. 2nd-3rd century CE

13. Grey schist carving depicting the birth, life and death of the Buddha Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, c. 3rd century CE

14. Grey schist carving of a seated Buddha before a nimbus Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, c. 3rd-4th century CE

15. Grey schist carving with Bodhisattvas (enlightened ones) and Buddha Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, c. 3rd century CE
The University of Melbourne Art Collection. David and Marion Adams Collection

16. Grey schist carving with seated deity flanked by acolytes and attendants Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, c. 4th-5th century CE

17. Grey schist stupa fragment depicting the Buddha, seated in a cave, flanked by a lion and a bull Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, c. 3rd century CE
18. Grey schist stupa fragment of a robed sage
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, c. 3rd century CE

19. Grey schist stupa fragment with carved attendant figures and leaf motif
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, c. 3rd century CE

20. Grey schist stupa fragment with carved Buddha and female attendants
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, c. 3rd century CE

21. Grey schist statuette of a seated Buddha
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, c. 3rd century CE

22. Pink sandstone statuette of a lion rearing over an elephant
Kaccapaghata, India, c. 11th century CE
The University of Melbourne Art Collection. David and Marion Adams Collection

23. Stone Buddhist carving with standing central figure (possibly Vishnu) surrounded by numerous attendants
India, c. 3rd-5th century CE

24. Sandstone carving of a celestial dancer adorned with jewels and wearing a beaded girdle
Rajasthan, India, c. 13th century CE

25. Stone carving of a female figure standing in tribhanga (tri-bent pose) with Vidyadhara (upholder of wisdom) and Nagaraja (king of snakes) at the upper corners
India, c. 12th century CE

26. Stone carving of a mythological creature and two figures
India, c. 3rd-5th century CE

27. Stone carving of Durga Bihari (invincible or warrior goddess)
India, c. 9th-10th century CE

28. Sandstone carving possibly of Surya (sun deity) with sunflower or lotus bloom and two attendants
Central India, c. 12th-13th century CE

29. Stone carving with standing central figure wearing conical head-dress surrounded by attendants
India, c. 12th-14th century CE

30. Sandstone head of Devi (Hindu goddess) with elaborate coiffure and earring
Uttar Pradesh, Mathura, India, c. 2nd-3rd century CE
The University of Melbourne Art Collection. David and Marion Adams Collection

31. Sandstone statue of a seated Buddha surrounded by pillared arch
India, c. 3rd-5th century CE

32. Terracotta head of an emaciated Buddha
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, c. 3rd century CE

33. Terracotta head of a rishi (Vedic seer) with remains of pigment
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, c. 3rd century CE

34. Terracotta head of Bodhisattva with elaborate coiffure
Pakistan, ancient region of Gandhara, c. 3rd century CE

35. Map of India and surrounding countries showing British dependent and independent states, 1822
7 sheets: hand-coloured lithograph mounted on linen publisher: A Arrowsmith, London
The University of Melbourne Map Collection, Rare and Historical Maps
36. Wyld’s theatre of war in the Punjab. Map of the routes through the Punjab and the adjoining states, 1846
hand-coloured lithograph mounted on linen
publisher: James Wyld, London
The University of Melbourne Map Collection, Rare and Historical Maps

37. Map of Delhi and its environs, 1857
hand-coloured lithograph mounted on linen
publisher: Edward Stanford Ltd, London
The University of Melbourne Map Collection, Rare and Historical Maps

38. Map showing the localities of the principal mineral and vegetable products of India and the course of the trunk railways put in by Major General GB Tremenheere, 1858
hand-coloured lithograph

39. Map of India, 1869 (reprinted 1877)
hand-coloured lithograph mounted on linen
publisher: Surveyor General’s Office, Calcutta
(compiled by JON James, outline and writing by James M Dalziel, hills by Francis TJ Walsh, engraved under the superintendence of CW Coard)
The University of Melbourne Map Collection, Rare and Historical Maps

40. Map showing district and division boundaries, towns, railways and stations, published under the direction of Colonel HL Thuillier, RA-FRS, Surveyor General of India, 1870
hand-coloured lithograph
publisher: Surveyor General’s Office, Calcutta
The University of Melbourne Map Collection, Rare and Historical Maps

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Map of Delhi and its environs, 1857
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COVER
Catalogue 1
Circa, 2011

ENDPAPERS
Catalogue 5
Found burnt text, 2012
WHAT WOULD
INSPIRE HIM