Gigi Scaria: Dust
18 September 2013 – 2 February 2014

Delhi-based artist Gigi Scaria will hold his first major solo exhibition in Australia at the Ian Potter Museum of Art with new photographic work revealing a strong connection between the Australian and Indian continents.

Scaria’s new work has been conceived and inspired following cultural exchange programs with the Australia India Institute in Jaipur and as Macgeorge Fellow at the University of Melbourne in 2012 where he exhibited Prisms of Perception at the Ian Potter Museum of Art.

The new body of work reflects Scaria’s response to Australia’s vast landscapes and the inspiration to explore the geographic diversity within his own country.

Through a series of new video works, photographs and painting, Dust presents large scale images of salt lakes and expanses of desert not immediately recognisable as India. The place is Kutch, a district in the far western state of Gujarat, near the border with Pakistan, where much of India’s salt is farmed.

Scaria creates an immersive experience which explores the awe and simplicity of landscape, the impact of time and human habitation and the ability of place to shape emotions.

“Even though you feel like you are in the middle of an ocean, you stand solid and supported in the salt,” Scaria says. “There is a fear and fascination about being an outsider but the vastness is also oddly comforting. There is stoicism about the place.”

Dust, also the title of the key image in the exhibition, suggests a city consumed by the desert and forewarns of the cyclical relationship of humanity and nature, the ebb and flow, creation and destruction over time. Perhaps marking the beginning of a new direction, this work is the only post-produced photographic work in the exhibition referencing Scaria’s earlier urban preoccupations.

One of a new generation of Indian artists, Scaria (b.1973) has established a significant international exhibition profile, has participated in more than 90 exhibitions since 1994 including India’s debut presentation at the 2011 Venice Biennale. The curator of the Indian Pavilion at the 2011 Venice Biennale, Ranjit Hoskote, will write an essay for Scaria’s Dust exhibition catalogue and an interview with Gigi Scaria by the exhibition curator, Bala Starr, will also be featured in the catalogue.

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Images are available upon request and interviews with the curator and artist can be arranged.
About the artist:

**Gigi Scaria** was born in Kothanalloor, a village in south Kerala, India, in 1973. After receiving a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree (in painting) at the College of Fine Arts, Thiruvananthapuram, Scaria moved to New Delhi where he undertook a Master of Arts (in painting) at Jamia Millia Islamia. Moving from Kerala to New Delhi was a significant experience that in turn influenced Scaria’s creative work. He began to make art reflecting the impact of city life. He worked with mapping, abstract forms and narrative painting, later focusing on the mapping of the ‘city’ itself. In the mid-1990s, while establishing his career as a professional artist, Scaria also illustrated children’s books and taught art at an experimental school in New Delhi.

By the turn of the millennium, increased international exposure was accompanied by prestigious residency opportunities and solo exhibitions in India, Germany, America, Hungary, the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. In 2002, Scaria was awarded an Inlaks Scholarship, and was artist-in-residence at UNIDEE, Cittadellarte-Pistoletto Foundation, Biella, Italy. That year, he also participated in *Indians + Cowboys*, an exhibition at Gallery 4A (Sydney).

Scaria’s creative repertoire includes a range of media such as digital art and video, photography, installation, sculpture and painting. Scaria has worked primarily with themes of modernity and urbanization, and icons that are personal, political and historical.

Since 2002, Scaria has made thirty independent films which explore a range of topics inspired by place and the people who inhabit particular locations that are imbued with different social and political conditions. The films include: *A day with Sohail and Maryan* (2004), *Home: in/out* (2005), *Raise your hands those who have touched him* (2007), *All about the other side* (2008), and *Raise your hands those who have spoken to him* (2010). Subjects such as the children who inhabit the streets of New Delhi, and the memories of people who have met or seen Mahatma Gandhi and Mao Zedong inspire him, while recent video work deals with the impact of the rapid growth of India’s cities and the social conditions that have been affected by this change.

Scaria’s landmark sculptures refer to the modern world and the rapid pace of urban development. In the sculpture *Someone left a horse on the shore* (2007), apartment buildings are incorporated into a wooden Trojan horse. Scaria’s metaphor of the Trojan horse is the threat that consumes everything, including the spaces on the periphery, until nothing is left. Scaria also suggests alternate metaphors, because even ‘thinking’ spaces are threatened by urbanization. Similarly, in *Wheel* (2009), a photograph featuring a giant wooden Ferris wheel, personal space is brought into question with reference to an amusement park and the urban environment. All the thrill, danger, excitement, and stimulation of the city is symbolized by the Ferris wheel, which features multi-storey buildings in place of seating, situated against a landscape of urban dwellings.

Scaria’s most recent solo exhibitions *Amusement park* (Chemould Prescott Road, Mumbai, 2009), *Difficult to imagine, easy to construct* (Art Asia Miami, 2008), *Site under construction* (Videospace Budapest, 2008), and *Triviality of everyday existence* (the National Art Studio, Changdong, Republic of Korea, 2008), feature video art that includes interviews (fictional and non-fictional), documentaries and animation.

In 2011, Scaria was one of five artists (with Zarina Hashmi, Sonal Jain, Mriganka Madhukaillya and Praneet Soi) to represent India at the 54th Venice Biennale in the exhibition *Everyone agrees: it’s about to explode*, curated by Ranjit Hoskote. In *Elevator from the sub-continent* (2011), an installation made for the biennale, Scaria created a simulated space representing an actual elevator that the audience was
invited to step inside in order to ‘time travel’ to different locations in India. Inside, projected photographs and video animation on the walls of the ‘elevator’ created the sensation of moving underground through a range of living interiors representing social metaphors. For example, below ground level, one-roomed dwellings symbolized the living conditions of the poor. The illusion of moving deeper underground into a dark space where the elevator became stuck, led to it stopping in darkness before moving back to the world above through the various strata broadly representative of human society. Scaria’s work was also presented at the 3rd Singapore Biennale. In Singapore, Scaria exhibited *Steps of predicament* (a sculpture featuring a spiral staircase), *Open invitation* (comprised of two paintings), and a video work titled *Book yet to decipher*. In 2012, Scaria created a sculptural installation for the exhibition **Topical heat: new art from south Asia** at the Govett Brewster Gallery in New Plymouth, New Zealand. He also made thirteen banners for the *Banner project* in the village of Nees, Denmark.

Gigi Scaria is a 2012 University of Melbourne Macgeorge Fellow and in 2012 presented an exhibition titled *Prisms of Perception* at The Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne.

**Further reading**

- Mohan, Satyanand, ‘The archaeology of urban life’, the Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art (FICA) research fellowship project, New Delhi, 2008.

[www.gigiscaria.in](http://www.gigiscaria.in)