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Kalpesh Lathigra, *Nicole*, 2023, unique polaroid photograph, 11.5 x 8.9 cm

Tender like asphalt

Xiaochi Dong, Kalpesh Lathigra and Juliette Lena Hager

10 November - 22 December 2023

Private View: 9 November, 6-8pm

Taking object as mapped reality, *Tender like asphalt* is an exhibition of works that negotiate paths of communication between the subjective, transcendent realm, and the presumed absolutes of time, space, cause and effect. Whether through studies of internal subjects reflected in snail shells and dirt-gashed earth, fleeting snapshots of hotel rooms and other liminal spaces, or assemblages pointing to the performativity of objects, Dong, Lathigra and

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Hager here employ the mechanical and chemical processes that underpin how we accept and assimilate with the world around us.

The works presented have formed from quiet reflections on the absurdity of change, ceremonies and rituals used to digest societal structures, and constructed observations to mark the existence of figures and events. There is an inherent desire across these three, intersecting practices to unpick and derealise figments of daily life, as much as to construct dreamlike passages above its platitudes, coded behaviours and strange serendipities, evoking the solace, and often philosophical precision, of distance from and digestion of realities.

About the works:

Xiaochi Dong

The practice of Xiaochi Dong is rooted in classical Chinese painting and explores the experimental logic of contemporary painting, resulting in works with harmonious visual features that blend various aesthetic traditions. Inspired by artificial landscapes of different scales, such as Chinese gardens, botanical gardens, and miniature ecosystems, the artist intertwines different concepts of simulating, imitating, and compressing nature. Through the creation of images rich in light, humidity, and atmospheric implication, Dong aims to give form to contemporary natural landscapes that evoke spiritual excursions through liminal realms. He draws on the notion of wòyóu, a term referring to the act of “wandering while lying down”, in his depiction of dreamlike temporalities.

Working with a near monochromatic mix of linen, pastels, ink and volcanic ash, Dong limits the tonal palette of his paintings in an attempt to evoke shifting spatial frameworks. Across these works, figurative trees and mountains blend with abstract shapes, opening up the canvas to imagination. These are not works concerned with imitating external reality, but are rather ultimately about creating a spiritual space between emptiness and fullness beyond worldly distractions, this vacantness acting like a breathing apparatus, operating between microcosm and macrocosm.

Kalpesh Lathigra

Across his extensive practice, expanding out from his appointment as an Independent staff photographer in 1994, and now encompassing documentary, fashion and cameraless works, Kalpesh Lathigra actively integrates his subjective presence. The works often reflect on real and perceived memories, and moments of nostalgia, shared experience, mythologies and peace, as well as how identity is set across these notions. His imagery is rooted in a curiosity about people, and about the medium itself, presented through various film techniques.

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Across his series, the artist continues to contemplate diasporic memory and postmemory, fatherhood, and how identity is built and rebuilt, and then portrayed, notions that intersect interestingly in *A Democratic Portrait*, his polaroid - being a ubiquitous medium - pictures of public figures, from celebrities such as Nicole Scherzinger, Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Hans Ulrich Obrist, to family members, refugees and politicians. Here, two portraits from this series are set against three images from three further series that encircle them in time: a peeled polaroid left to destroy itself, a holy tree withered and waiting in the artist's kitchen, and a single chair shot in the corridor of a now-demolished-but-once-iconic hotel. Together, they dialogue the relationship between staging, construction and liminality.

Juliette Lena Hager

Juliette Lena Hager's sculptural assemblages explore structures and social rituals that negotiate and frame individual and collective experience. A governing principle within the body of work presented in *Tender like asphalt* is reality as a set of objects, structures and interactions that happen quietly and unnoticed, in constant, timeless flow, and the artist's need to question and disassemble these existential rituals. This plays out across the installation as a choreography, a rehearsed palimpsest where objects adopt the role of performer, revealing residual aspects of themselves that go beyond a utilitarian function, showcasing their inherent symbolisms. *PRUDENTIAL ASSURANCE* (?-2023) was made in tandem with Hager's reading of Erving Goffman's writings on social interaction; he likened this to theatre, and people in everyday life to actors on a stage, each playing a variety of roles, while being observed by the audience. The piece, and the artist's wider recent works, expand out from this notion, considering it an invitation to peel back and explore the habits, automatism and mechanisms of interaction.

Derealisation, perception during dissociative states and the disassembling of the self-evident are important concepts within this body of work. They underpin the lens through which the artist is approaching game, theatre and stage — in their somewhat fakeness, atemporality and simulation. Hager negotiates these scenes by setting her own compositional stages using objects that hold individual histories, exemplified by their marks, wear and materiality. This point of departure, working with items selected for their various rhythms, their fragments carrying dynamic associations, allots her room to then redraw these paths of communication in relation to the other objects in the installation, abstracting and re-appropriating them into warped theatres that encapsulate both the complexity and rigidity of social rituals and behaviours.

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Xiaochi Dong (b. 1993, Shanghai) lives and works in London. He holds both a BA and an MA in Chinese Painting from the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, where he studied between 2011 and 2018, and gained his MA in Painting from the Royal College of Art, London, in 2013. Ground exhibitions include *Gardening on Borrowed Time*, Studio West, London (2023); *Return to Nature*, Pearl Art Museum, Shanghai (2023); *RA Summer Exhibition*, London (2023), *Evolution: Singularity*, Nan Ke Gallery, Shanghai (2023); and *Recursion*, Split Gallery London (2023).

Kalpesh Lathigra (b. 1971, London) lives and works in London. He began a Postgraduate Diploma in Photojournalism at the London College of Communication, before deciding to leave in 1994. Shortly after, he was awarded The *Independent* Newspaper Photographer Traineeship, going on to freelance for a range of national newspapers in the UK over the following seven years. In 2000, he began working on longer-term projects and series, intertwined with magazine and commercial assignments. In the same year, he was awarded a 1st Arts prize at the World Press Photo awards. In 2003, he embarked on a project documenting the lives of *Widows in India*, receiving The W. Eugene Smith Fellowship and Churchill Fellowship. In 2014, Lathigra was awarded a Lightwork Residency in conjunction with *Autograph* and, in 2015, a Photoworks Commission for the Brighton Photo Biennial. His first book *Lost in the Wilderness* was published in 2015, and his second book, *Memoire Temporelle*, in 2022.

Solo exhibitions include *Memoire Temporelle*, Have a Butchers Gallery, London (2022); *Memoire Temporelle*, Anahita Contemporary, Berlin (2021); and *Becontree*, The Royal Institute of British Architects, London (2021). Group exhibitions include *Bridging Landscapes*, French Riviera, London (2022); and *Facing Britain*, Kunsthalle Darmstadt, Darmstadt (2021). His work is held in numerous UK and international collections, including the V&A Permanent Collection, Lightwork and the Martin Parr Foundation.

Juliette Lena Hager (b. 1998, France) lives and works in London. Her research-based practice combines methods of collecting, harvesting and assembling archival materials. Group exhibitions include *The last off-site show on the Earth*, Off site and Plague Space, Krasnodar (2023); *Fracture me, Tenderly*, Greatorex Street, London (2023); *This is Nowhere, and it's Forever*, artist-organised exhibition in the former Libris bookstore, Brussels (2023); *Fair faire 2*, 3537, Paris (2023); *Language itself is a revolution*, SOMA, Marseille (2022); *51.5323, -0.105*, Candid Arts Trust, London; *Hiraeth*, Espace Future, Paris (2021); and *Kevätsalonki*, Kosminen Gallery, Helsinki (2021).

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