

PRESS RELEASE

SAHIL NAIK

Ground Zero: Site as Witness/Architecture as Evidence

Nov 25 – JAN 10

Opening Preview: Saturday, Nov 25 2017, 6 – 8pm

Experimenter presents *Ground Zero: Site as Witness/Architecture as Evidence*, Sahil Naik's first solo at the gallery. Using methods of distance and proximity, the exhibition explores Naik's continued interest in conflicts around the world, and other state sponsored and independent terrorism. Naik works with occurrences, from which he is twice removed and constantly seeks correlations between myth, religion, history, facts and available information on the internet. In his sculptural installations, the fine line between the real and the staged blur – the exhibition reflects on ideas of perception, identity, the shifting nature of evidence and the retelling of conflicted history. The exhibition will preview on 25 November 2017 and will be on view until 10 January 2018.

Employing an intensely sensitive acumen for sculpture, Naik delves into the poetics of terror, the metaphor of the bomb, the dynamics of its tangible and intangible characteristics and the landscape that these agents construct. The viewer is confronted with *Lazaretto* an imposing sculptural installation in the main gallery, which evokes a haunting impression of a suddenly abandoned space, referencing a post-apocalyptic landscape that seems to be fraught with hazard, isolation and caution. As it draws one into its visually intense presence, an enhanced perception of loss, in the dampness of decay and a space where architecture and the ethos of the times, become linked. Its architecture grows to become a tool of evidence, one that is meticulously staged, but one that is not far from reality. It is not clear upon first sight if this space was abandoned because of an act of terror, or a disease or a fire or an explosion. It does build a speculative narrative in the mind though, as to what might have happened. Naik seems to be interested in examining that moment where evidence, architecture, reality and rumours come together and leads the viewer to build a narrative or imagine its history.

The spectacle of destruction, abandonment and decay born out of the wars of the modern world, the movement of people, the fall of economies, lockdowns, disinvestment and demolition has created something Naik refer to as dead cities. These "rustbelt cities," "shrinking cities," and more recently "legacy cities," live an afterlife on the internet as images, a news story or in the fascinations bred by rumours. These cities of the modern world become marginal spaces filled with old and obscure objects where one can see and feel things that one can't in the ordinary world.

Naik grew up in the largely peaceful state of Goa in India, close to famous temples, which attract an increasing number of visitors every year and thereby are now subject to a wide range of security procedures, that use racial, social and behavioural profiling to identify 'threats'. In another section of the gallery is, *Ground Zero: The Artist as the Suspect/Bomber* that deals with the identification of potential 'suspects' based on certain iconographies formed by social, political, ethnic and religious constructions of who may or may not be dubious. These assumptions are primarily consolidated by and supported by sources such as eyewitness accounts, CCTV grabs, behaviour, movement, position/location at the time of 'incident' etc forming a relationship between him/her and the site. In *Ground Zero: The Artist as the Suspect/Bomber*, Naik creates

modelled replications of familiar locations and subjects them to handmade improvised miniature explosions, thereby destroying the model he originally made. As an artist who creates and then destroys the space, Naik started to use the phrase 'Artist as the Suspect/Bomber', trying to also look at how 'anybody is capable of terror' and that this anybody is intrinsically a part of a regular milieu. The work attempts to reflect on the vulnerability of our everyday spaces and how we always imagine of terror being at a distance from us. Naik seems to search for the memory of this post destructed space and express the trauma that the space may undergo – all that remains of it is the documentation that withers in public memory; it gets reduced as just another incident of terror living an afterlife – as data on the internet, as a jpeg or a video, a report.

The exhibition seems to move from a macro view of a city to a site and finally to a microcosm of spaces. In *Portraits of Home and Exit Wounds*, the final series of sculptures, Naik looks at interior spaces of homes, maybe even using architecture as material to understand people inhabiting these spaces or even tracing a suspect. One is not sure if these domestic settings are within the destroyed sites or if they are spaces that have been unearthed in the process of investigation – a storyboard of crime and memory seems to arise, where Naik finds himself taking centre-stage.

In all of Naik's sculptures, the absence of humans is apparent, although their traces of inhabitation are ever present and the physicality of the spaces he builds has a particular textural appeal. In *Ground Zero: Site as Witness/Architecture as Evidence*, Naik seems to be employing architecture and narrative simultaneously, specifically leaving a significant margin for chance and speculation. At the same time Naik questions the importance of the site as witness; its authenticity as an empirical evidence to an occurrence and ability to be used as evidence.

Sahil Naik completed his M.V.A (Sculpture) from the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University of Baroda and B.F.A with a specialization in Sculpture from Goa College of Art. Naik is the recipient of several awards including the National Students Biennale Award instituted by the Kochi Muziris Biennale 2017; The Jury Prize, Centre of International Modern Art, CIMA Awards 2017 Kolkata, 2017 and The Chinmoy Pramanick Memorial Award for Excellence 2016, Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda 2016; Recent workshops and residencies include the Khoj International Workshop, Goa (2017), Peers Emerging Artist Residency (2017) and Peers Share (2016). Naik lives and works in Goa. This is Naik's first solo exhibition.

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