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ICONOCLASTS & ICONODULES

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Religare Art showcased ICONOCLASTS & ICONODULES, curated by Ombretta Agro Andruff, a group show highlighting the talents of various emerging Indian and International artists. The show features a group of 16 Indian and international artists who, from diverse cultural backgrounds, angles, styles and media, use "iconic", easily recognizable images to comment and in some cases make sharp criticisms of the very establishments that generated those icons. Seen appreciating the artworks were Amrita Gandhi, Gayatri Sinha, Samar Jodha, Kusum Sahani, Rashika Kajaria, Olivier Vidal, Mukesh Panika amongst many

others. Bold interpretations from a list of renowned artists come forth in art works that resound a multitude of cultural and religious references, with respect to the iconic subjects to from insightful masterpieces.

Crosses, Zombies and Skulls. Women as goddesses and temptresses. Deities and Demons. Snakes and Swords. Haute Couture logos and masterpieces of Western art.

Sounds like an apocalyptic and non-sensical shopping list a punk-chic teenager would write. But actually, these are some of the recurrent "icons" that inhabit the funny, witty, cerebral, at times dark, at times charmingly disarming artworks that make up "Iconoclasts & Iconodules".

Images of birth and destruction, of worship and irreverence, of consumerism and high art alike are brought together in this exhibition which, by combining often opposing elements, aims at creating sometimes messy, yet inspired possibilities. While at first sight some of the works could be dismissed as unimposing artful play, in many cases one cannot help to see them as something more than what the pictures imply.

Artists such as Indian Julius Macwan, Avishek Sen, Anita Dube as well as Belarusian Pasha Radetzki and Italian Federico Solmi, valiantly put cultural references and religious iconography in one plane, making their pieces ambiguous and thought provoking. While Macwan's, Radetzki's and Solmi's use of images of Christian iconography may be seen, by some, as "blasphemous", Sen and Dube borrow from, confront and sometimes pay homage to, the conventional notions of Indian as well as Western iconography in religion as well as in the secular tradition.

According to Ombretta Agro 'I think art should connect with people and should stimulate them to talk and discussed art, layman should visualize art through heart. So I brought different art form in one art show'.

Inspired by contemporary culture seen in its darkest shades, are the paintings and sculptures by Indian T.V. Santhosh whose work is inspired by photographs of war and strikes us as a poignant commentary of the crisis of our globalized present as they unfold.

Mumbai-based Reena Saini Kallat also uses Indian mythology as well as everyday objects and familiar stories as the starting point for many of her works. In this exhibition she showcases two of her poignant and iconic large-scale portraits of men and women from the Synonym series. The works are composed of several hundred stamps featuring names of people sandwiched between plexiglass panels that stand upright like a screen.

A similar political and social engagement, exemplified however through a very different aesthetic and conceptual approach, is evident in German Tom Schmelzer. The artist, who also works with a variety of media, uses easily recognizable iconic images or phrases to comment on serious subjects such as the current war in the Gulf region, world hunger, religion and evolution, using wit and a good dose of sarcasm.

Bulgarian born and New York-based Daniela Kostova in her work addresses issues of geography and cultural representation and the uneasy process of translation and communication. The featured work, I Am Whatever You Want Me To Be, is an opulent photographic self-portrait that shows four archetypal characters that also appear

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in some of the artist's previous work. It combines Bulgarian tradition (the kukeri dancer, wearing a "beast" like costume) and Bulgaria's struggle with the idea of tradition (the chalga singer) with quotes from American pop-culture (boom box, fast food, television).

John Grande, a photo-realistic painter based in New York City, presents works evoking the famed Warhol's "Campbell Soup", one of the most recognizable icons of post-war art. Some of the same images and characters appropriated by Grande in his paintings come to life in the videogame Iconoclast Game, created in 2003 by Italian Lorenzo Pizzanelli and Iranian Fariba Ferdosi. The videogame allows the player, who takes on the identity of Marcel Duchamp or his female alter ego, Rose Sélavy, to interact with some of the most recognizable masterworks of the Western tradition, from byzantine mosaics to Juan Miro and Henri Matisse paintings.

Polarities of tradition and modern life are also explored in Gagandeep Singh's drawings. The Delhi-based artist's work deals with the art of storytelling, narration and contemporary drawing practices. He uses primarily pen and ink on paper and considers the pen a medium in itself that enables a patient, studied translation of his cerebral wanderings onto vacant stretches of paper.

New York-based Jeffrey Beebe is also featured with a series of his medium and small scale works on paper. Created over the last seven years, the works reflects on the sometimes playful, at other times darker side of the collective unconscious. His animated narrations borrow from myth and fable and find one of their first sources of inspiration in adventure movies and cartoons such as Jonny Quest, Flash Gordon, Star Wars, as well as comic books the artist grew up with as a kid.

Last but not the least, is the imposing three-channel video installation by Los Angeles-based Matt Sheridan. Disinformation Breakdown was conceived in 2008 as a response by the artist, back then an art student, to the ongoing war. The video, a 6-minute loop, is built from "marks of redaction" both painted by hand and digital: splotches, static, blur and mosaic-ing as well as architectural references. The sound, recorded in a 9-minute loop, is non-sync with the visual and is delivered by cell phone only, in line with the artist's wish of "funneling the spectacle back down to a more manageable, yet specifically individualized scale". Matt believes that people can do on their own.

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Images by Karan Thapa

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