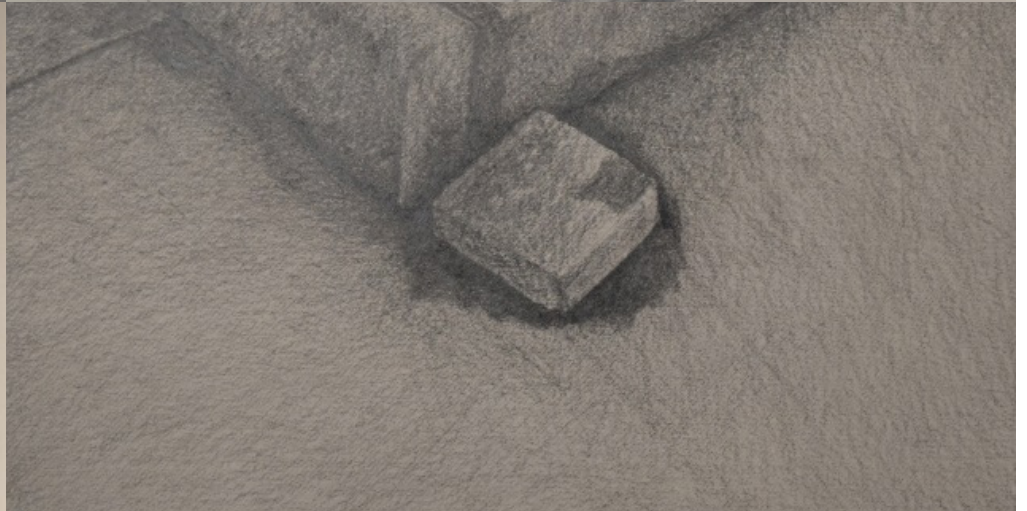
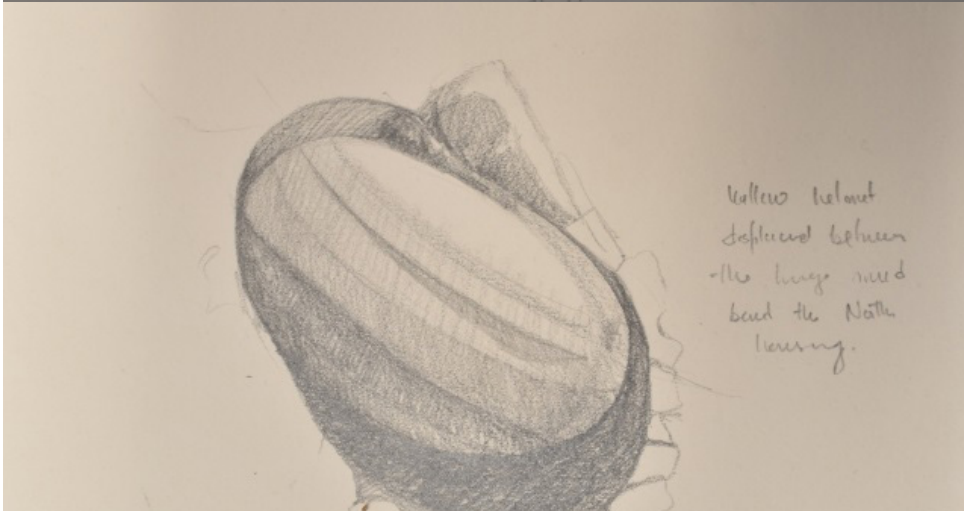
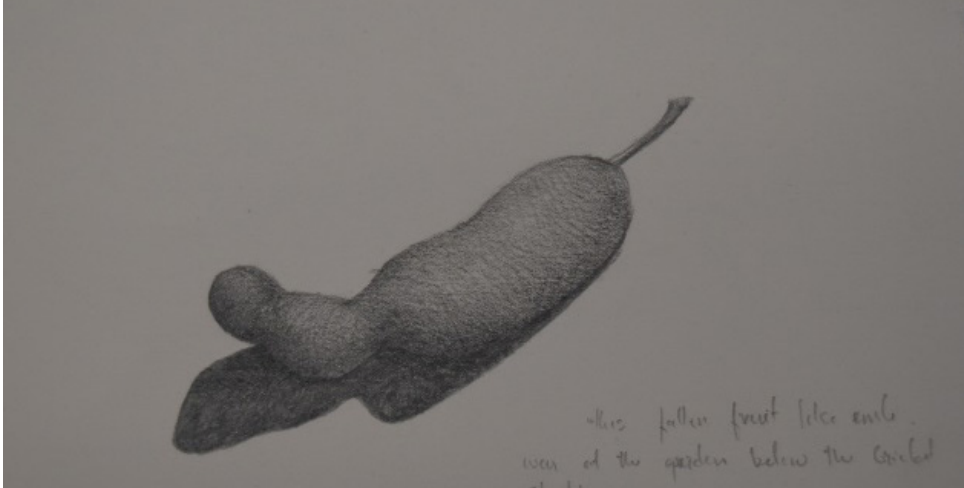
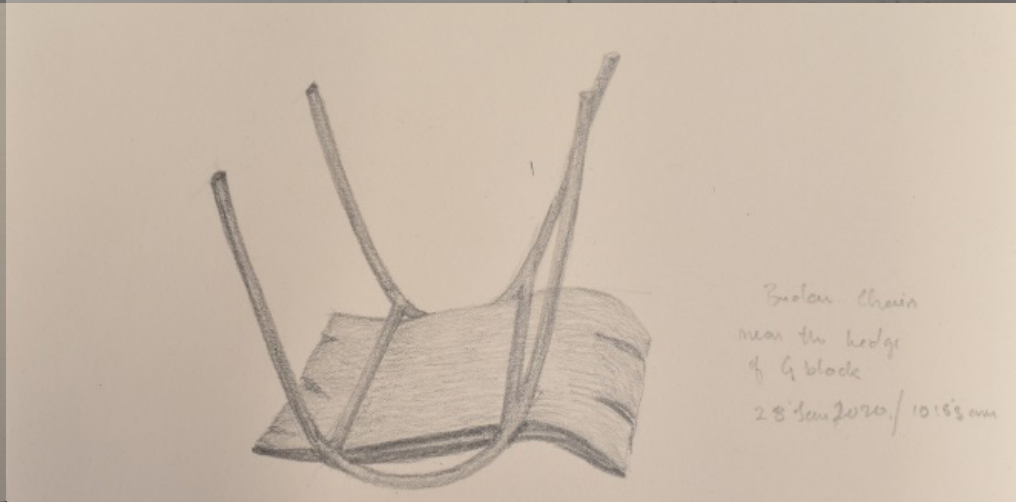
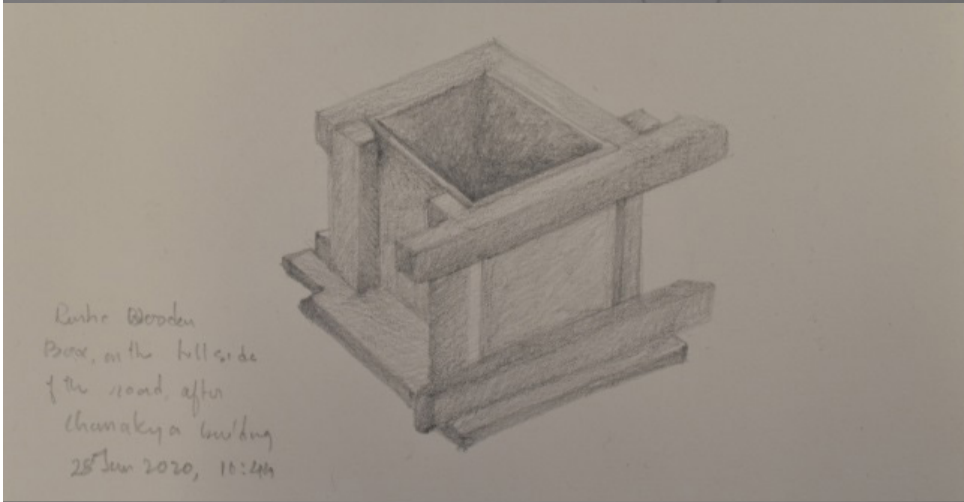
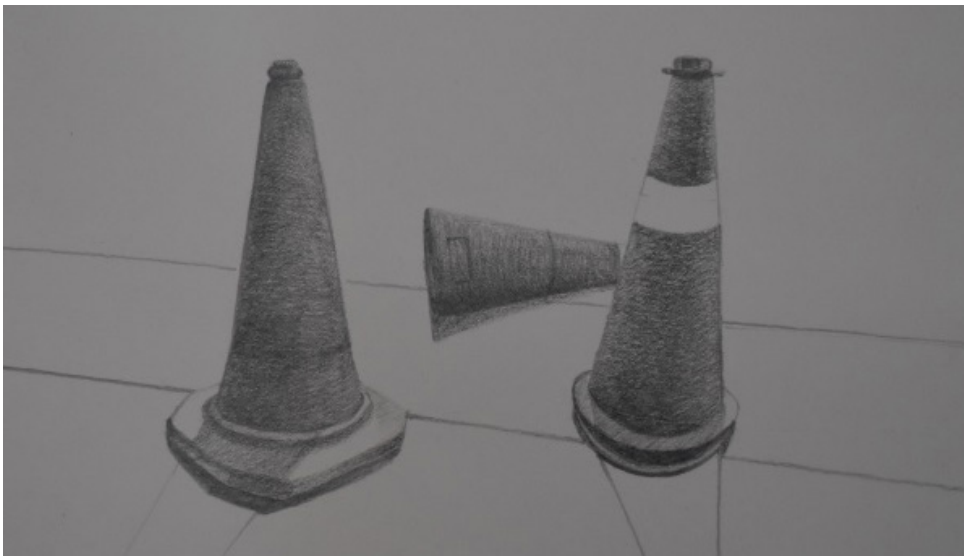




FLAME Artists' Residency 2020



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Introduction

A month-long program designed for art practitioners from around the world, the FLAME Artists' Residency (FAR) provides selected artists with the space and time to immerse themselves into their practice, using the theme of the program as inspiration. Running for the third year in a row, FAR 2020 began on the 3rd of January, 2020 and continued until the 3rd of February of the same year. This year, it centered around the theme of 'Boundary', and entailed several events, including introductory presentations from the artists, a colloquium with three other renowned art practitioners, presentations where the resident artists reflected on their time at the FAR, and their final presentations. The two artists selected for the program were dancer and theatre practitioner, Lakshika Pandey, and visual artist, Tsering Motup Siddho.



Hailing from Mumbai, Lakshika is a theatre practitioner, director, actor and dancer, trained in Bharatnatyam, Chhau, Butoh and Yoga. While she made her foray into dance through Bharatnatyam, she picked up forms such as Chhau and Butoh later in life out of interest in the aesthetic, thematic and historical aspects of these forms, along with a strong commitment to learning them. Her major performances, based on texts such as Vijaya Ramaswamy's *Walking Naked: Women, Society, Spirituality in South India*, Rabindranath Tagore's *Horikhela*, and plays by Samuel Beckett, deal with themes of polarity, inner healing, and the empowerment of women.

Tsering is a visual artist who lives and practices in Leh. Tsering grew up in Karnataka, where he also completed his Bachelor's degree, moved to Delhi for his Master's degree, before finally shifting back to his hometown in Leh. In his introductory presentation, Tsering spoke about standing out visually in Karnataka and Delhi because of his identity, as well as not fitting in completely in Leh because of growing up in other parts of the country. This identity crisis appeared as a recurring theme in his work. Moreover, he spoke about a formal shift in his art practice, from using painting as a medium during his college days, to now preferring more conceptual works of art. His works such as *In Transit* as well as *How To...* center around the themes of migration, identity and stereotyping, and reflect his inclination towards conceptual art.

As the residency progressed and the artists explored the idea of the boundary, we could see their identities, experiences, memories and ways of looking at the world around them seep into whatever they made. Their works were not mere responses to the space, society, and politics around them, but were shaped by both, their personal histories and the larger forces around them.



Artists' Colloquium: 11th January

a part of the residency, a colloquium, with performance artist Anuja Ghosalkar, visual artist Achia Anzi, and filmmaker Kranti Kanade was organized on the 11th of January. In an attempt to further inspire and creatively stimulate the resident artists, the three visiting artists were asked to make presentations based on the theme of 'Boundary', but in relation to their art practices. Their presentations were followed by an interactive session with the audience which consisted of students, faculty and the resident artists.

The first speaker, Anuja Ghosalkar, runs a documentary theatre company called 'Drama Queen' which works with archival absences and personal histories to create a performance. Her presentation was titled 'That Apparent Boundary' and focused on the horizon or that apparent boundary where the surfaces of the earth and sky appear to meet. She began her presentation by talking about her childhood and her journey as a woman. Her performance practice does not consist of one single form but rather transgresses the boundaries between archives, theatre, gender, audience etc. In the presentation, she explored the theatrical form as cinematic and the use of multimedia in a theatre performance. She spoke at length about her show Lady Anandi which focuses on her grandfather's legacy. In impersonating her grandfather and instances of his life, she moves fluidly through boundaries of gender. In this one woman show she moves about the stage and uses archival material such as photographs and videos in the background. Her documentary theatre is feminist in nature and examines archival absences and undocumented narratives to understand and problematize the idea of the performer and the audience. She does not view boundaries as limiting or something that creates a hindrance but rather as imaginary lines which allow for transpiration and transgressi



After Anuja, Achia Anzi, an assistant professor of Visual Arts at Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, presented a detailed history of his work in relation to the idea of a boundary. Titled 'Boundary: Threshold or Closure?', his presentation explored boundaries as being restricting but also liberating. He looked at the German philosopher Martin Heidegger's no.

of boundaries, "that from which something begins its presencing"; a threshold. The postcolonial discourse views and questions boundaries for being limiting but using Heidegger's approach to borders he focused on the perception and the purpose of the boundary. He delves into this space of 'in-betweenness' through his artwork and his positionality as an Israeli who has studied and worked in India for a very long time.

Finally, renowned filmmaker Kranti Kanade spoke at length about the idea of personal boundaries. In his presentation, 'Cinema As An Expression', he addressed personal stories and intimate experiences and spoke about how they could be brought into the public through cinema. Among many other questions, he asked an insightful question about memories from one's life and how they can be used to cross borders. While talking of personal experiences, he shared a story from his childhood and his relationship with his father and how that was reflected in his film 'Idol'. By telling personal stories through cinema, one can bridge the gap across cultures because perhaps the most intimate experiences are universal and relatable to all human beings. Kranti is also an ardent tree lover and his upcoming film focuses on the illegal killing of tre



Through these presentations and the interactions that followed them, it became clear that each artist had been constantly negotiating with boundaries both in their personal lives, as well as in their artistic practices. While Anuja spoke extensively about the boundaries around the idea of the woman, a category in which she never fit perfectly because of the way she looked and sounded; Achia attempted to look at boundaries as not merely limiting, but also as the point where presence begins; Kranti reiterated the importance of conquering personal fears: he showed us how his films became more and more honest to his memories, experiences, and emotions over time, thus crossing the self made boundaries of what could and could not be expressed through cinema. These varying yet related perceptions of the boundary not only gave the resident artist multiple perspectives of viewing the same thing, but also exposed them to different ways of incorporating these perspectives into their art practices. At a later stage in the FAR, both Tsering and Lakshika spoke about the significant role of the colloquium in giving them fresh substance to chew on, stimulating them creatively, and allowing them a fresh perspective on what they had been working on until then.

Artists' Reflections: 29th January

This year the artists also worked in close collaboration with students of a sculpture course, and there was a significant and rich exchange of ideas and inspiration between them. In a presentation very close to the final day, where Lakshika and Tsering reflected upon their journeys at the FLAME Artists' Residency thus far, they spoke about the role of the conversations they had with some of the students, and the ideas that sparked post the colloquium, that led them to coming up with what they finally wanted to present.

Lakshika, for example, spoke about initially being overwhelmed by the idea of the boundary. When she tried to think of the boundaries in her life, she was surrounded by them at every stage; from the milky way, to the walls of her red blood cells, everything was a boundary. In this plethora of boundaries, she was struggling to find a focus to centre her performance around. In the colloquium, however, she picked up on the idea of the difficulties in as well as need to overcome personal boundaries, and made it the central idea behind her performance.

For Lakshika, however, the act of boundary-crossing, would not merely be limited to the themes of what she was to perform, but also be integral to the form of her performance. As a trained Bharatnatyam dancer, she had been made to internalise strict dos and don'ts of the form, boundaries that often become extremely challenging to overcome because of how deeply ingrained they are in the dancer. She had also been trained extensively in the Japanese dance form of Butoh: a post-War Japanese dance form that differs thematically as well as aesthetically from Bharatnatyam. Lakshika's performance, combining improvised dialogues and movements, with elements of Butoh and Bharatnatyam, was to defy traditional categorisation by entering a realm of fluidity between forms and genre.





boundaries around us.

The afternoon ended with students sharing insights about their insights from spending a term long course thinking about and developing their own ideas around the central theme of the boundary. Much like Lakshika and Tsering, they too had gone through many ups and downs before settling on what they wanted to make for their final presentations. It was clear that having two, more experienced artists in their presence had helped them develop their ideas further.

Tsering, similarly, had had “an emotional journey of ups and downs”, until he had finally

arrived upon a single idea. Elaborating on the process of creating a work of art, he spoke about how, throughout the residency, he had tried to cheat himself by attempting to create something abstract or imaginative, pointing at the trend that views such work as more intellectual and creative than others. Tsering also spoke about being stuck with a single medium: screen printing. He had found the medium exciting when he entered into the residency, had experimented with it for almost half his stay at FLAME, and was then naturally reluctant to give it up, despite realising that nothing productive was coming out of it. Eventually, however, he gave up on both: screen printing, as well as the insistence on coming up with a highly abstract piece.

During his stay at FLAME’s newest and most polished residential block, and his wandering around campus, Tsering was struck by how everything on campus was meant to look perfect. He spoke about how someone came to clean his room and trim the plants every single day, and how this made him wonder if the place he was living in had any loopholes whatsoever. And so, equipped with a camera, he positioned himself as a spy and went around campus looking for these so-called loopholes in an otherwise perfect setting. His photographs became evidence of the presence of the objects he was spotting. Tsering wanted to use these objects, which included stray leaves on the ground, a construction worker’s cap, cones on the road, and a pipe coming out of the drain to create a map of this space. While some of these objects remained where he had first seen them for days, others disappeared in a matter of hours: their presence or absence pointed to the constantly changing, fluid nature of most



The fact that Lakshika and Tsering dedicated a significant portion of their presentations to their respective processes of arriving at their final ideas, reflects the kind of intellectual and emotional effort that goes into creating a single work of art. Moreover, while they were going to present

these works as the final outcome of their month long residency program, both of them agreed that they wanted to continue working on their projects further, that the end of the residency was in no way the end of their journeys with what they had worked on. They were keen about nurturing these projects and turning them into something bigger.

Final Presentations

After a month long journey of much anxiety, moments of sheer frustration, as well as several productive conversations amongst themselves and with others, and finally arriving at concepts they wished to pursue, Lakshika and Tsering were ready to present their work on the 3rd of February, 2020. While students had put up their work inside the sculpture studio, Tsering had displayed his work right outside the studio, and Lakshika was dressed and prepared to perform for the audience. A mix of students, faculty, members of the FLAME management, as well as guests from outside had gathered to witness the artists' presentations. Having spent the afternoon surrounded by works of art, and interacting with their makers, they left with much to reflect on about themselves and the world they inhabit.

The day began with Tsering's presentation, as he took us around his display outside the sculpture studio, explaining what he wished to convey through his work, why he had displayed it the way he had, and what he wished to take the project further. He listened patiently as we bombarded him with questions and interpretations of his work, and responded with much humility and a hint of coyness to all the barrage of praises showered at him.

Tsering's final display was made up of several rectangular sheets of glass, carefully placed at different spots outside the sculpture studio, to the idea of a constantly shifting boundary made up of everyday objects. Each glass sheet was divided into two halves: while one half was occupied by a photograph, he had stuck the illustration of an object on the other half. Explaining the process of coming

up with his final display, Tsering told us that on his long walks as a spy looking for loopholes on campus, he had photographed objects that he thought fit his what he was looking for. He came back and made illustrations of the same objects using the photographs as reference. These objects ranged from a wire emerging from an open drain, to a sign indicating a bump in the road, to a stray leaf that had fallen off a tree. A few days after taking photographs of them, he went to the same spots where he had found them initially; while some of them were still there, others, like the leaf, had naturally disappeared. He photographed these spots and objects once again, and stuck them alongside their corresponding illustrations in his final display. As viewers, we noticed that while some illustrations were accompanied by photographs of the same objects, others were displayed next to photographs of empty locations; we understood that perhaps the objects had not been there when Tsering went back to look for them the second time. And without him saying, we understood what he was trying to convey. For many of us, this was the first time we had thought of a grand space like FLAME through the small, mundane objects that made it up. We had hardly ever perceived its boundaries as constantly shifting depending on the presence, absence, or movement of these objects.

After all of us had made our way through Tsering's display we settled down in the sculpture studio in eager anticipation of Lakshika's final performance. She entered slightly nervous and jittery, but we hardly sensed any of that anxiety once the performance began. Crossing the strict boundaries of theatre and dance, Lakshika's performance began with her singing a short hymn from her childhood that spoke about the stretch of the Ganga where its water looked black, and was therefore considered inauspicious. Through her performance, Lakshika spoke about the various fears we have at different stages of our lives that often become the obstacles in our paths to reaching our full potential. While the young child in her performance is afraid to cross the stretch of the river that looks pitch black, the adolescent is afraid of maths, and the fear of death constantly looms over the adult who seems to have everything else. She also makes a commentary on religion, as a force that both instills fear in us, as well as the force we resort to in order to overcome this fear. The performance comes full circle as she ends by showing the former child, now a grown up, as confronting her deep seated fear of the river, and finally being able to cross it.

Not conforming to the strict conventions of the two dance forms: Bharatnatyam or Butoh, in terms of movement, dress, and traditional thematic concerns, Lakshika inspired us to cross boundaries of form as well as personhood. Perhaps these boundaries are not so distinct from each other, perhaps, if made immutable (as they often are), these boundaries ultimately end up limiting creative expression and stifling our growth as human beings.

While the conclusion of the FAR 2020 marked the end of Tsering and Lakshika's stay at FLAME, it in no way signified the end of their journeys with the ideas, concepts, and the works of art that they had only begun to nurture at the residency. Their interactions with members of the FLAME community and the visiting artists not only helped them develop their works creatively, but also exposed us to fresh ways of thought, response and expression that have made our experiences at FLAME far richer than they otherwise would have been. The experience was as enriching for us as members of the FLAME community as we hope it was for them.



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