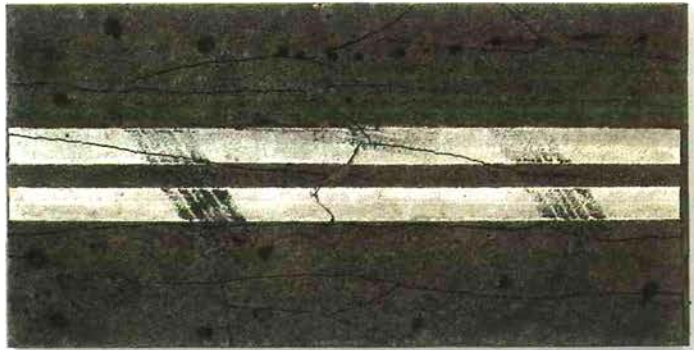


Excavated Gestures

In their observations of the everyday, three young artists explore commonplace moments and dissect overlooked spaces



1

Vikram Divecha

Surface No. 1, 2012, mixed media, 122 x 244 x 7.5 cm.
Courtesy Cuadro Fine Art Gallery, Dubai.



2

Mariam Suhail

Brooding Proposals 4, 2013, permanent marker on paper,
71.1 x 91.4 cm. Courtesy Gallery Ske, Bangalore.



3

Jacqueline Hoang Nguyen

Space Fiction & the Archives, 2012, film and installation of archival materials, dimensions variable. Photo by Michel Brunelle. Courtesy the artist and VOX Centre de l'image contemporaine, Montreal.

2

Mariam Suhail

BANGALORE

In an era when visual culture is frequently dominated by glitzy works on a monumental scale or overwhelming new-media installations, it is refreshing to encounter the minimal line drawings and understated sculptures of Pakistan-born, Bangalore-based Mariam Suhail. They whimsically capture people in ordinary circumstances—particularly in moments of exchange, pause and reflection: “If you watch real-life situations persistently, things can start to float or just suddenly go into slow motion,” she writes.

For her first solo exhibition, at Bangalore’s Gallery Ske in 2009, Suhail created haphazard compositions in permanent marker that depicted routine chores, small domestic gestures, common phrases and mundane objects. Among the 27 works from this series, most are inscribed with captions that offer multiple interpretations of the image. For example, *6* (2009) illustrates a man and woman feeling for one another’s temperatures. What might at first appear to be a platonic gesture is turned on its head by a caption that reads: “Young boy and young girl holding onto each other.” Suddenly their actions become emotionally charged. Conversely, where one expects more revealing descriptions, the captions are surprisingly literal. In *26* (2009), seven people sit around a table, one girl with her arms around a large, fluorescent pink heart. The captions provide the following alternative scenarios: “Conversation with heart on table” and “Young girl taking heart off the table.” The bluntness is disarming, adding to the allure of the play between text and image.

Suhail’s recent suites of drawings “Characters and Stills” (2013) and “Brooding Proposals 1 to 5” (2013) continue her exploration of such suspended moments. The former appropriates stills from Pakistani dramas and Indian films of the 1970s and ’80s that capture moments when the protagonist is engaged in deep contemplation and introspection. “Brooding Proposals 1 to 5” projects these climactic on-screen moments into a real-life context. Faceless figures gaze longingly toward the unknown, supported by a displaced, floating architectural element that mimics a stage prop. In dramatizing these moments, Suhail rejects materialism, exposing the superfluous constructs that fill our everyday lives and their ultimate irrelevance in resolving our personal conflicts.

3

Jacqueline Hoang Nguyen

NEW YORK & STOCKHOLM

On June 3, 1967, the world’s first UFO landing pad was officially opened in the prairie province of Alberta, Canada. Citizens in costume eagerly awaited their extraterrestrial friends, with homemade antennae quivering in anticipation. Although the alien visitors never touched ground, the landing pad remains to this day, perhaps as testament to Canada’s legacy of multiculturalism, extending the ideal beyond the restrictive confines of national borders and out into intergalactic space. In her project *Space Fiction & the Archives* (2012), French-Canadian-Vietnamese artist Jacqueline Hoang Nguyen has made this event the subject of meticulous study, amassing dozens of souvenirs and newspaper clippings, and creating a documentary film from archival footage. Contextualized through these materials, the seemingly absurd structure becomes a conceptual springboard for dissecting notions of citizenship, nationalism and cultural policy.

Nguyen parses archives for moments in history that might offer commentary on present events. As part of “Laughter,” a group exhibition this year at Apexart in New York, the artist invoked an unexplained laughter epidemic that swept through Tanzania in 1962, using 25 loudspeakers to permeate the gallery with raucous sound. For *An Epidemic Resistance* (2009) highlights laughter’s transgressive potential, recalling cultural theorist Marjolein ‘t Hart’s opinion that such levity is a “weapon of the weak.” Elsewhere, Nguyen’s intimations are understated. A blank poster is silkscreened with the words “Cash Only” in hand-scrawled text lifted from a notice in a Chinese restaurant. In this act of reproduction, the artist comments obliquely on the “cash only” economy that skirts the capitalist system while simultaneously remaining essential to its functioning.

In another printed work, *Seizing Hold of a Memory as It Flashes Up* (2010), Nguyen blind-embossed a sheet of paper with the speech given by 12-year-old Severn Suzuki—daughter of Canadian-Japanese environmental activist David Suzuki—at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This was a small contribution to a meeting that would eventually result in the signing of the Kyoto Protocol. Nguyen is an astute observer of such small, gestural moments, seeking to reconnect them to the broader cultural network.

1

Vikram Divecha

DUBAI

In the United Arab Emirates, car culture is an unabashed indulgence. If you read UAE newspapers, not a day goes by without some discussion of the latest traffic laws—and of the country’s numerous highway tragedies. Dubai itself is a coastal city, spanned by the major thoroughfare Sheikh Zayed Road, a dramatic central artery whose connecting capillaries are in constant flux as the landscape is perpetually developed, torn down and redeveloped. Vikram Divecha, a Beirut-born, Mumbai-raised sculptor, has lived in Dubai since 2005 and is fascinated not by the UAE’s shifting sands, but by its rapidly excavated and repaved streets.

To that end, Divecha uncovers a scrappy, grimy beauty in his “Urban Epidermis” series (2012) of wall sculptures. These are massive, weighty trompe-l’oeil re-creations of road surfaces, complete with their white-and-yellow-painted directional markers, tire marks and oil stains. Each slab is composed of a thin layer of asphalt, exposed to the harsh conditions of the scorching Dubai summer and actually driven over, a creative process that lasted seven months for this series. Hanging on the wall, their forms bear painterly resonance. In the two-and-a-half-meter-wide *Surface No. 1* (2012), the double white line running across the middle of the piece appears like an ironic riff on the sublimity of Barnett Newman’s “zips.” The cracked pavement of *Surface No. 6* (2012) is painted over with the tip of a tire-marked yellow arrow; its chevron shape immediately recalls those of American Color Field painter Kenneth Noland’s iconic canvases.

In matching such purportedly transcendent abstract forms with lowly infrastructural materials, Divecha appears to be countering the “embrace everything new” mentality of the contemporary cityscape. In March of this year, he took actual pavement bricks from a sidewalk (some still with their yellow traffic markings) and rearranged them into a 22-square-meter flooring for the courtyard of a heritage house in Dubai. *Degenerative Disarrangement* (2013) is a kind of anti-mosaic, but it is elegant and historical nonetheless, speaking to the constant struggle to maintain integrity in the face of constantly fluctuating conditions.