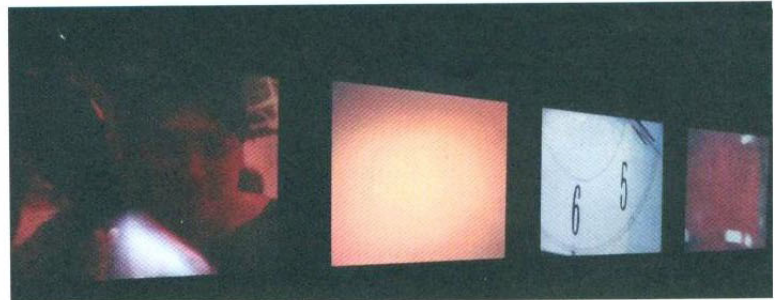


Navjot Altaf's TOUCH- IV

TOUCH IV - THE WORK

Touch IV is a 22 channel video installation consisting of television monitors and headphones arranged in an adjacent form, depicting the voices of 22 professional sex workers, both women and of the third gender. The imagery used is layered and complex and like Navjot's earlier works, makes it difficult for the viewer to read and comprehend. Touch IV explores the politics of touch and representation, interrogating notions of gender, sexuality, security, class and identity. Navjot brings in an archive of images, words, atmospheric sounds, objects, symbols and play of light, conjoining both factual and fictional associations to the context. She juxtaposes her own experiences of desire and intimacy (one that is accepted in society) with those of sex workers for whom such interactions are determined by commerce and class. There is an element of abstraction in both the visual and linguistic aspects of the work with each voice filling the screen, appearing and disappearing, articulating their choices to willingly be in the profession. The viewer encounters the ambiguities of their lives through a gamut of emotions, pain, trauma, confidence and resignation, through visual and aural experience. Navjot interjects into the imagery several tools of her research and documentation – the recording machine, the type-writer, the computer and CDs¹ while layering them with shadows and referential signs from the environment in Sangli - the shifts of a rotating fan, the tube-light in the narrow streets and the fire sparks from the torch of a welder or the wheel of the knife-grinder.

Images of nature – sunlight and water also appear with other ambivalent insertions such as that of a child who wants to swim but is wrenched back by a brutal force which is societal and circumstantial. Or is the water too murky to swim in, where the child chooses to step back to an imagined freedom? What is the thin line between good and bad touch? When does a touch become desirable or repulsive? How does one negotiate with middle-class apprehensions and judgments of such touch, of erotic/ economic relations that occur beneath the surfaces of our lives? The artist probes at these very anxieties, questioning the insider-outsider positions of both the artist and the viewer, layering realism and abstraction in such a way where the lived experiences of the protagonists can never be fully grasped. The construct of the sex workers is not only of distress, but as individuals with opinions of the right to one's body, issues of consent, who question the 'sacred' institution of marriage while dealing with battles of human rights, AIDS, sexual health, class, economics and power.



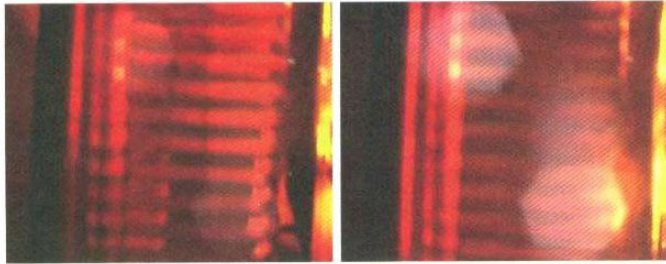
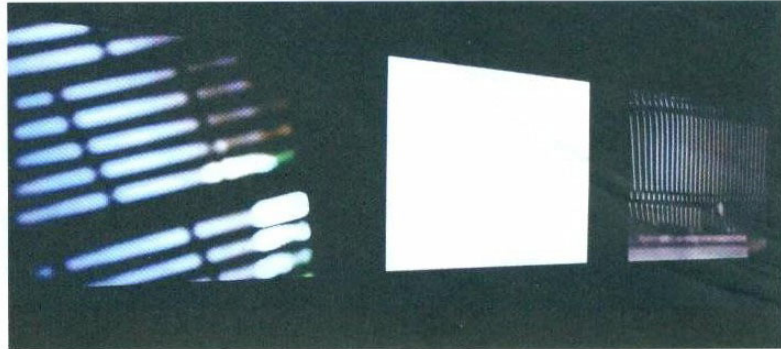
THE ARTIST AND SOCIETY

"Since the 90s I have been thinking about the politics of art-making and have been working/exploring and observing from both locations - inside and outside the mainstream. I feel that both art and non-art spaces provide an opening into broader cultural and political areas within which, certain questions can be asked and critical analysis articulated.

For me it is not dealing with the art system in isolation but - about understanding, analyzing critiquing, and creating 'social processes' through 'art making processes' as well.

I was drawn to Installation art in the early 90's for the material and materialist critique and interactive/ co-operative characteristics of the practice. This led to a more complex questioning and understanding of my own position in my recent collaborative works in Bastar , individual or / collective identity. Is interactive / collaborative art locative in a continuum with previous forms and informed by broader range of disciplines including cultural histories of activism is what I have been interested in understanding." (Navjot Altaf, *interview*)





VIDEO ART IN INDIA

The discourse on new media art practices in India, such as it is, originates in the transitional period of the early 1990s, when Western curators began to parachute into India, looking for idioms that they could recognize as “cutting-edge”, such as the installation, the performance, and video art. This narrative of the shift from an art situation dominated by painting, to one in which new media practices set the tone, is adequate as the snapshot of a decade.

Significantly, new-context media art is peopled by artists whose education and interests are not restricted to a Fine Arts milieu, but enriched by diverse subcultures. While the 90’s showed the beginning of an innovative gallery practice, it were larger cultural forces that brought photography, installation and video art into the conversation of the Indian art world, imparting to them both intellectual legitimacy and economic currency.



*Text credits: Navjot Altaf, Amrita Gupta Singh
Additional research from writings by Nancy Adajania on Touch IV
Images Courtesy: Talwar Gallery, New Delhi/New York*



'Touch IV' 22 monitors video Installation 2010
 A project in cooperation with Sangram : Sangli