



RASHID RANA's *Asi-e-Shuhud-o-shaahid-masshhuud (Viewing, Viewer and Viewed)* (2015), a live, interactive video installation, where one screen is set in an exhibition room in Venice's Palazzo Benzon and the other is installed in an identically fabricated room located in Lahore's Liberty Market. All photos in this article by Jyoti Dhar for ArtAsiaPacific.



War Within II (2013–14), from the series "Transpositions" by **RASHID RANA**, is based upon Jacques Louis-David's neoclassical painting *Oath of the Horatii* (1784). The original historical painting has been appropriated, mirrored and digitally manipulated as part of Rana's practice of subverting pictorial realism and art historical canons.



From **SHILPA GUPTA's** "Untitled" series (2014–15) where shattered and gathered bone ceramic china, made from 52 percent cattle ash, are encased in a vitrine, revealing the absurdities of the cattle trade, which is illegal in India and legal in Bangladesh and often involves games of deceit and corruption.

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MY EAST IS YOUR WEST: INDIA AND PAKISTAN AT 56TH VENICE BIENNALE

BY JYOTI DHAR

"Is there going to be a squabble?" asked my eight year-old son, when I told him that India and Pakistan are staging a collateral event at the 56th Venice Biennale this year. "No," I explained, "The two countries are actually exhibiting their artists together, for the very first time, at one of the most important art events in the world."

Unfortunately, for many people in the Indian subcontinent—including the current generation of children—the dominant social and political rhetoric remains one of India versus Pakistan, rather than India *together* with Pakistan. To what extent the Delhi-based Gujral Foundation's exhibition, "My East is Your West," at the Palazzo Benzon in Venice, is able to alter or re-position this entrenched way of viewing the relationship between the two countries is questionable and most likely unquantifiable. Collaborative events such as these tend to create synergies, ripples and resonances in the most unexpected of ways. Whether or not the exhibition provides an adequate or articulate representation of contemporary art practice from the Indian subcontinent is also not the crucial matter at hand. The fact that the exhibition serves as a poignant gesture of collaboration between two nations with a shared, conflict-ridden past and a post-traumatic, divided present—and a common platform for its artistic voices at an event of such international significance—is something that prompts one to sit up and take notice.



RASHID RANA's *My Sight Stands in the Way of Your Memory* (2013–15) takes the image of Caravaggio's painting *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (1598–99) as a starting point and slowly reveals the hundreds of tiny images contained within it, which depict news footage, CCTV imagery and film scenes, through a nine-channel video installation.



RASHID RANA's *A Mirror Lies Vacant* (2015) is a large box plastered on its sides with heavily pixelated images that, to a certain extent, correspond and mimic the very room in the Palazzo Benzon in which the work is located.

The works on display, by Lahore-based Rashid Rana and Mumbai-based Shilpa Gupta, seek to move far beyond reductive geo-political fixities and expected historicized narratives and open up notions of borders, migration, perception and identity in a number of different ways. Gupta's intense, research-based practice translates into delicate, conceptual and subtle forms, exploring issues of legitimacy, fragility and opacity with regard to the reality of negotiating national borders (in this case, that of India and Bangladesh). Meanwhile, Rana's new, larger-than-life sculptural and video installations take his interest in playing with perception, space and scale to another level, by including the virtual and the interactive. Staged in separate sections, there is little to connect these two artists' bodies of work, save for the overarching idea of injecting a certain movement or fluidity into the notions of place and identity. However, at the exhibition's grand opening, issues like this seemed to pale in significance to the triumphant atmosphere and the claiming of the exhibition as being collectively "ours"—by practitioners from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh alike. In fact, nobody seemed to care, or even notice, that Gupta's ten-meter-high, centerpiece light installation, *My East is Your West* (2015), was not on display (apparently Venetian authorities had not given the required planning permission in time for the show's opening). Indeed, the exhibition was always meant to be more than just a sum of its parts.



In this durational performance from SHILPA GUPTA's series, "Untitled" (2014–15), a man sits at a table and consigns, via carbon transfer, waves of connected lines to rolls of white cloth, which were made in Phulia, Bangladesh. The resulting blue lines could be markings referring to the Bengal delta, the national borders or, more abstractly, the formal contours that both maps and humans are made up of.