

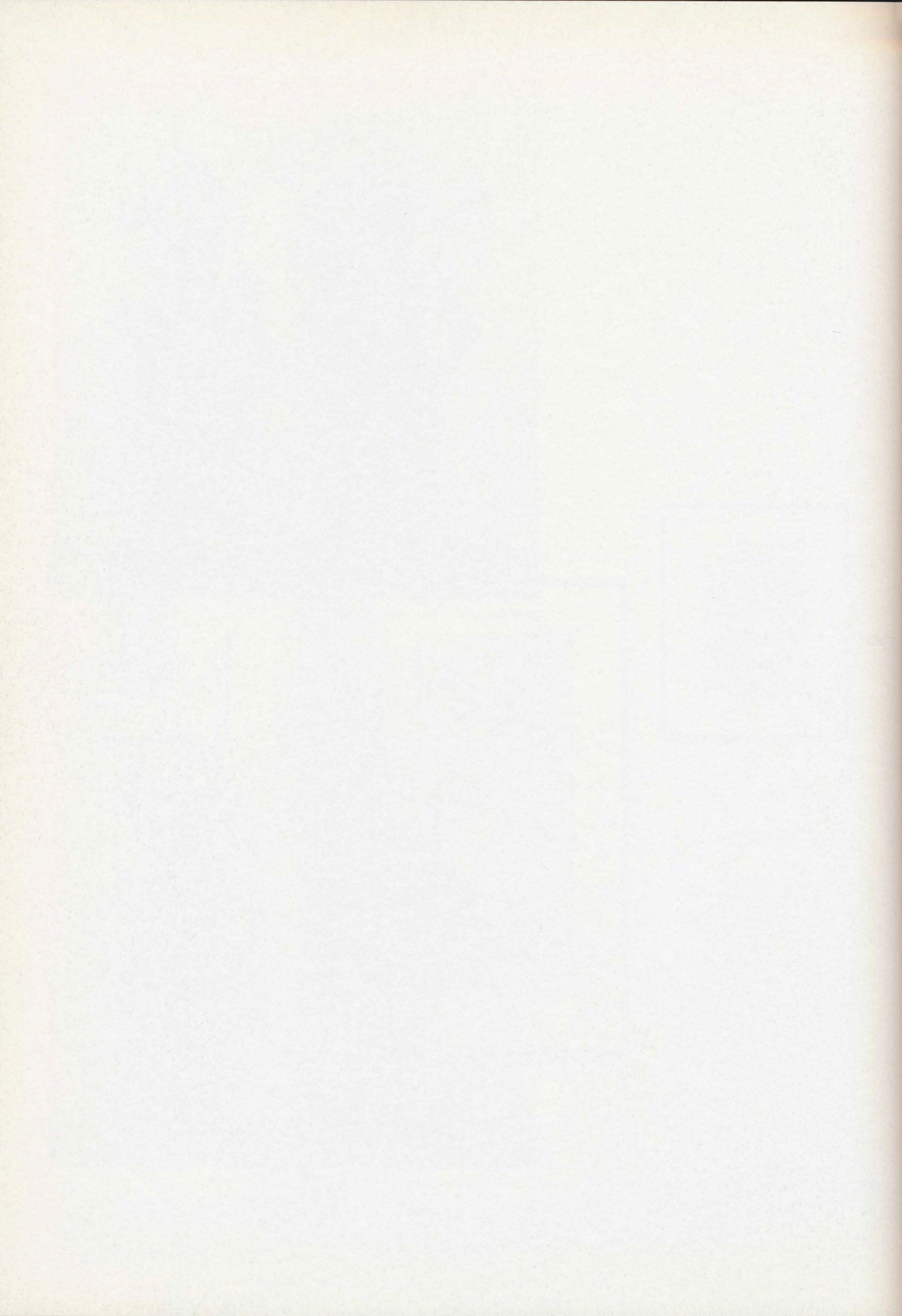


39. 明王I (二枚組) / Myōō I (2 cutout pieces) / 2001



40. 明王II (二枚組) / Myōō II (2 cutout pieces) / 2001

38. カーリーの剣 / Sword of Kali / 2001



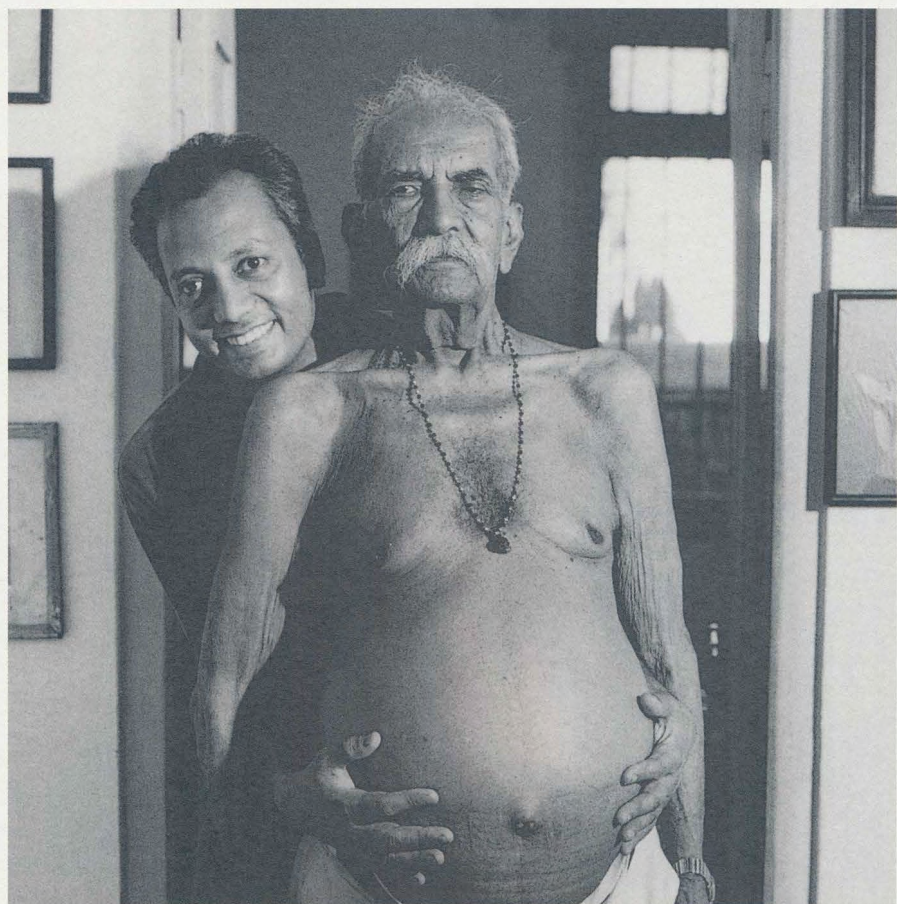


Artist's Statement  
[Atul Dodiya]

LABYRINTH/LABORATORY: Manufacturing Bombay  
Atul Dodiya-style  
[Ranjit Hoskote]

Atul Dodiya: Sincere Impurity  
[Hayashi Michio]

From the Fragmented to the Plural: Atul Dodiya's Art  
[Sitanshu Yashaschandra]



In recent years I have allowed all of the world to enter the loneliness of my studio. I have painted, as if, at the crossroads — where east meets west, the popular and naïve meet the high classical or the very personal, autobiographical image overlaps the universal icon.

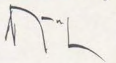
From these apparently anarchic hybrids I hope to understand the nature of creativity.

Creativity, earlier meant that I was a link in a long chain of art-makers from the ancient to the postmodern. The inclinations and obsessions have moved. Almost dramatically the earth has shifted beneath my feet. As my notions of security and beauty have changed, a deluge of images has hit me. Living in a nation seeped in poverty maybe it is unavoidable. Death, decay, corruption, compromise, struggle are not distant metaphors of the fall of man. These are real, right here, lived with. Metallic omnipresence. Metal as a roller-shutter-guard to a shop. Opening / closing it is a symbol of the daily grind. Time passing by, the cruel industrial sounds, the lonely labourer, the glamour and glitz of the city..

The city for me is the chief inspiration. The overlapping contradictory images, which I paint, are born here. Constant contradiction is truth. Imagine the earth shifting beneath one's feet perpetually.

Gandhi's absence manifests itself in the different mounds of ruin—the political mess, the hypocrisy and deceit of the individual. In the national playground we are all sliding down. As an armless, helpless individual I have made an archive of our citizens' sleeves. Crafting wings from chopped arms is the prerogative of a despairing artist-citizen. Rogier van der Weyden and Picasso could paint tears. I can only go about circumambulating ladders, sliding down, looking up, knocking against skulls and bellies. In the final countdown it is all skulls and bellies.

Atul Dodiya



### Atul Dodiya in the Context of Contemporary Indian Art

In the still rather conservative ethos of contemporary Indian art, many successful artists aim to perfect a personal style, which serves as a distinctive and identifiable authorial signature. In such a context, the 1959-born Atul Dodiya has marked a remarkable departure: an acknowledged leader of the younger generation, he is committed to a dazzling and extravagant multiplicity of styles. Over the 1990s, he renounced his early deadpan photorealism in favour of a metaphorically accomplished idiom<sup>1</sup>: such a shift was inevitable, since Dodiya chose to confront the instability generated in Indian art, during that period, by the questioning of the classic painted frame or formal sculpture as the proper locus of art practice.

Through the late 1990s, Dodiya's paintings dramatised the predicament of the artist—specifically the painter—in an age when the artistic prerogatives of representation and reflection have been usurped by the mediatic structures of satellite television and the Internet on the one hand, and by new art forms like the video-installation and the assemblage, on the other.<sup>2</sup> In revitalising the painted surface while responding to these twin challenges, Dodiya began to construct his paintings and assemblages as arguments, allegories or aphorisms. His references span the visual gamut from the comic strip and the popular religious oleograph, through the advertising billboard and the movie poster, to his favourite paintings from the Indian, European and American traditions. The distinctions between classical and demotic, “fine art” and popular culture, are blurred in his richly hybrid work.

Dodiya restores to the artwork, therefore, its status as a site where experience may be re-fashioned into allusive, even elliptical pictorial fictions. And since he does not believe that the artwork should maintain a silence about its own strategies, many of his paintings are highly self-reflexive. This means that Dodiya also reflects on the relationship between his artwork and the society in which it is produced: his paintings attest to the sense of crisis he feels as artist and as citizen, in a postcolonial society beset by chronic asymmetries of economic and political capital.

In the process of expressing this sense of crisis, Dodiya has been experimenting with formats that permit him to extend his painterly art practice into three dimensions. His intention is that his art, which has always negotiated between the elite-classical and the subaltern-demotic levels of meaning while remaining anchored in the gallery, should articulate itself in a far more public and interactive manner with its viewers. The major formal problem to which he has addressed himself, in this context, is the reconciliation of the domain of objects with the domain of paintings.

With the roller shutter paintings<sup>3</sup> that he began working on in 2000, Dodiya found a mode by which this schism between objects and paintings could be overcome. Having taken this step, he has now moved on to embrace, as basic materials, a variety of street furniture and implied public-space formats: not only roller shutters, but also collapsible gates, ladders, tiled walls and playground slides. These recent works, executed during 2001, will receive their first public viewing during the present exhibition.

The dominant presence of hardware in Dodiya's current work admits of several interpretations. First, this choice of forms and materials allows him to challenge the implicit division that prevails in a conventional exhibition space, between inside and outside, gallery and street, and therefore, by extension, between the frame-protected artwork and the curiosity of viewerly desire. Secondly, it permits the artist to acknowledge the crucial subaltern presence in the metropolis, and to bring into the exhibition space the subaltern realities of artisanal labour and mechanical industry. And thirdly, the use of such street furniture and architectural props enables him to link his reflections on the economy and the culture together in a politically sophisticated visual-spatial language.<sup>4</sup>

The interior environment that Dodiya fabricates through his hardware “readymades” becomes a simulacrum of the metropolitan streetscape, with its ingenious variations on survival-scale design and inventive multiple use of space and materials. This interior environment alludes to the hazardous yet tenacious life led by Bombay's street-people, and its slum- and shanty-dwellers. The shutter, indicating commercial activity, is a metonymic trope of the metropolis: its normal rolling-up and -down signifies business, employment, prosperity; its forced rolling-down

signifies the strike or shut-down called by local politicians or mafiosi during a wildcat strike.

The collapsible gates suggest the binaries of power/dispossession and security/threat. The wall punctuated with tiles, transfer-glazed with portraits of secular heroes as well as the icons and symbols of every religion, is another signature device of the metropolis: it bespeaks a practical ecumenicism, one designed to prevent people from urinating on public walls, out of respect for the images. In the big city, mythology retains its traditional value as an archive of faith, but it also acquires a new value as a bargaining counter in social and political transactions.

By invoking these devices, Dodiya draws our attention to that Bombay of deprivation which the Bombay of privilege attempts to edit out of the metropolitan narrative. By superimposing the street on the gallery, he generates a symbol for these two simultaneous cities-within-a-city, which are caught up in a permanent collision loop with each other. The bourgeoisie has long nursed the comforting illusion that the two are separated by the railway tracks—that one begins where the other ends, except during such spatial transgressions as crime, labour strikes and Communist marches, when the chaotic forces of the deprived threaten the well-planned domain of the privileged. In actuality, Bombay is composed of mixed-use, multi-ethnic and multi-class neighbourhoods, rather than zones segregated by ethnicity or income level: the simultaneous cities-within-a-city manage a strained joint occupancy of the metropolis, signalling their presence to each other through competing symbolisms of cultural aspiration and patterns of material attainment.

By drawing us into an awareness of this situation in the space of his interior environment, Dodiya successfully captures us in our own contradictions: for we must acknowledge the fact that our act of viewing and reflecting on questions of poverty and dispossession takes place from the relatively privileged location of the gallery viewer. And so we find ourselves physically embedded in a simulacrum of the metropolis, whose tensions reflect the tensions of the society and nation-state: through the most visceral aesthetic experience, the artist-as-citizen has sensitised us to the fact viewers are citizens too. Dodiya thus achieves a politicisation of the viewing experience, while also resolving with aplomb the formal problem of renewing political art, rescuing it from the exhausted clichés of social (and socialist) realism.<sup>5</sup>

#### Dodiya as Citizen-Artist: Bombay as Home and World

To assert that Bombay is Atul Dodiya's lifeworld is to enunciate the obvious: it is the city where he was born and raised, and has always lived. It is when we begin to tease out the political and cultural significance of late 20th-century Bombay as a lifeworld, however, that we realise how crucial the city has been, as a matrix for Dodiya's particular choices as an artist. We see, also, why no other city could have provided the circumstances that have made possible Dodiya's intriguing, affirmative yet critical, high-spirited yet pensive art. Let me clarify that, while I have no wish to reduce Dodiya's art to his biography, there is a persuasive case to be made out for the importance of environmental factors in an individual artist's development.

Bombay is a formidable metropolis: physically, its population of 12 million occupies what was once a chain of seven islands, and has now spilled over to the mainland of India's west coast; virtually, the city is an active node in the global cyber-economy. And while present-day Bombay became an international port under British direction early in the 18th century, its history of contact with the larger world dates back to antiquity: geographically, the city lies very close to Sopara, the Biblical Ophir, one of the great seaports of the classical world.<sup>6</sup> As one of India's oldest gateways to the world, Bombay symbolises a threshold between internationalism and locality.

A postcolonial metropolis, it functions as a staging point between the frequent-flier economy and the bullock-cart one, an interface between the culture of transnational brand names and that of ethnic folklore. As these oppositions have gathered intensity, over the 1990s, the duality of internationalism and locality has been sharpened into a conflict between the cosmopolitan and the parochial, between a democratic politics of inclusion and a demagogic politics of exclusion.

This may explain why many of its citizens insist on using the former name of their city,

Bombay, in preference over the new one, Mumbai, which was legislated into official use by a right-wing provincial government.<sup>7</sup> While both names were in simultaneous popular use, the split between Bombay and Mumbai underscores the polarisation between a progressive ideology of universality and an expedient ideology of regional sentiment. When called upon to take sides, Dodiya has elected firmly in favour of the former against the latter. He could scarcely have done otherwise, for his art testifies to an intimate experience of the postcolonial metropolis as a site of inclusiveness, diversity and hybridity.

Unlike many other artists of his location and generation, Dodiya has not been a restless creature devoted to travel and frequent changes of scene. Although he has travelled widely in Europe and spent a year in Paris on a scholarship,<sup>8</sup> he has never lived outside Bombay for an extended period; and within Bombay, he has always lived in the northern suburb of Ghatkopar. Such is the extent to which Bombay is a microcosm of the world, nevertheless, that his personal culture embraces the most plural influences and affinities.

Through reading, conversation, childhood inheritance and adult acquisition, Dodiya is equally at home with the paintings of Piero della Francesca and the paintings of Benode Behari Mukherjee; the enigmatic illusions of Magritte and the archetypal symbols of Brancusi; Hokusai's poetic delicacy and Boltanski's artisanal immediacy; the elegiac assemblages of Beuys and the ferocious guardian-deities of Japanese Buddhism. And at no point do his artworks lapse into a mere glossary of multicultural references; his pictorial quotations are held in place by a syntax of recurrent autobiographical motifs and images drawn from Indian popular culture.<sup>9</sup>

National identity is not a limiting condition for Dodiya, but an operational base for wide-ranging explorations. This stance is especially evident in his recent suite of roller shutter images, which are haunted by a sense of the tragic, whether at the epic or the domestic scale, at home or elsewhere. In these images, he counterposes the real and the iconic; he agonises over the devastating violence of natural disasters and socio-political aberrations, and dwells on the physical fragility yet enduring resonance of art.

We roll up a shutter bearing the icon of Lakshmi, the Indic goddess of wealth, painted kitsch-fashion; behind it, we find the terrifying image, based on a newspaper photograph, of three young women who hanged themselves because they could not afford a dowry (*Mahalaxmi*, cat.no.24). Dodiya paints his version of a stylised Malevich peasant on another shutter, placing a skull in his hand; the shutter opens to reveal the vista of a graveyard, a memorial to Stalin's purges: it is titled *Kalki* (cat.no.25), appropriately enough, after the apocalyptic saviour figure of Hindu futurology, who is both destroyer and redeemer. In another of the 2001 roller shutter paintings, *Flood in Dhaka* (cat.no.23), the artist memorialises the Bengali film-maker Ritwik Ghatak and the victims of the periodic cyclonic and riverine inundations in Bangladesh; in yet another, *Hiroshima Buddha* (cat.no.27), he offers an elegiac prayer to the Buddha icon melted down during the atomic destruction of Hiroshima, and to the Buddha colossi of Bamiyan, blown up earlier this year by Afghanistan's barbaric Taliban junta.

Dodiya's image-making practice is stimulated and replenished by the symbolic realities of Bombay's local/global interface. As an artist, Dodiya is a privileged member of the circle of initiates who inhabit the realm of high culture, the circuit of studios, galleries, archives and museums. But as a citizen of Bombay, he is also a participant in an expressive culture staged outside this circuit, a public relay of signs that operates at a variety of levels, ranging from the naïve to the sophisticated, the direct to the allusive, the archetypal to the ephemeral. It includes the mass-scale signage of advertising, the intuitive graffiti of the pavement-dweller and the subway artist, the lampoons and lampisteries of the political agitator, the kitsch votive images of the streetside shrine.

Dodiya's varied registers of concern suggest an analogy with this expressive culture, this kaleidoscopic domain of free-floating signs that is marked by the toxicity of ideology, the effervescence of fantasy and the publicity of aspiration. The artist is familiar with its variegated narratives: celebrity rumour and political demonology; the posters of popular movies; translites displaying giant images of fashion models; billboards advertising consumer goods produced by sleek First World transnational corporations using cheap Third World labour. He traces the



currents of Bombay's expressive culture, also, in the bewildering array of goods that hawkers spread out on its pavements, beneath plastic awnings or in the shelter of the arcades of the colonial quarter: goods that range from virility-boosting wonder drugs, music systems and computer spare parts to telescopes, used books and Chinese toys.

Like a diagnostician, Dodiya treats these structures, sensations and impulses as *symptoms* of the nation-state's health, its travails and jubilations. His paintings and assemblages embody a, specific reading of, and a strategic response to, the fusion of normality and phantasmagoria, slow-motion past and high-velocity present, that describes Indian metropolitan culture. Dodiya does not simply reflect Bombay's surfaces; rather, he manufactures Bombay anew in his artworks, responding to its gifts and provocations with irony and playfulness, but also with satire and pathos.

#### Bombay in the 1990s: The Violent Slash between "Local/Global"

The process of globalisation has exacerbated traditional social conflicts and engendered new genres of oppression in India. In the Bombay of the 1990s, accordingly, "local/global" has not always described a smooth interface; it more often marks a ragged border, a skewing of differences between the victims and beneficiaries of globalisation. The violent slash can be placed between several sets of opposed classes and interests: industrial subaltern/information elite, informal economic sector/organised economic sector, recycling economy/throwaway economy. I will elaborate on this urban syndrome at some length, since it forms the substratum and armature of Atul Dodiya's imagination and the source of his raw materials; he bears witness, in his role as citizen-artist, to its stresses and strains.

Bombay receives the dual traffic of rural immiseration and globalisation. On the one hand, there is a steady influx into Bombay of ecological and economic refugees dispossessed from rural India: these immigrants are recruited into the informal manufacturing and service economy, or into organised crime, and play a vital role in the city's vast "informal sector" as an unorganised working class. They provide Bombay with its domestic help, casual labour, construction workers, storekeepers, commercial sex workers and the anonymous bangle manufacturers, leather workers, shoemakers and tailors whose wage-slavery disappears behind the glitter of upmarket brand names.<sup>10</sup>

Despite their contribution to Bombay's economy, they are denied basic rights and the aegis of citizens' entitlements: uncertain inhabitants of Bombay's interstitial spaces, their squatter-settlements are built on encroached land, their electricity and water connections are illegal; their lives are at the mercy of the local bully, the land-shark and the municipal demolition squad. This is the milieu to which Dodiya alludes in many of the assemblages exhibited in "Labyrinth/Laboratory."

On the other hand, transnational corporations disperse their operations within India, taking advantage of the low-cost intellectual and physical labour available, thus generating a "sweatshop economy," incarnated both in the physical grind of the informal sector, and in the tight, time-zone-adjusted, night-into-day routines of medical transcript recorders and telephonic client services outsourced from the Western to the Eastern hemisphere.

Bombay's once flourishing, textile mill industry is now virtually defunct; it has left unemployment and crime in its wake, as well as continuing real estate wars among industrialists, trade union leaders, politicians and criminal gangs.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, as the virtual economy of information and entertainment expands, and 24-hour multi-channel satellite television and the Internet gain ground, a new conflict has developed between age groups and income groups divided by the local/global polarisation.

This conflict is fuelled by the anxiety and frustration caused by the most visible outcome of globalisation: the opening-up of a new market for consumer goods and the spread of conspicuous commodity-fetishism, a demonstration of purchasing power among the affluent that triggers off, in turn, the aspirations and frustrations of the classes whose modest incomes exclude them from the consumerist market. At their sharpest, the prevailing frictions among classes and interests in Bombay explode in the form of the mass-scale ethnic and caste riots, as well the protest-driven

commuter riots and the incidents of road rage that have periodically disrupted the city's collective life through the 1990s. Arguably the most cataclysmic and traumatic of these disruptions took place over December 1992-January 1993, following the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, northern India, by Hindu right-wing goons: elements of the Shiv Sena, an aggressive regionalist-fascist party, joined with factions of the criminal mafia to launch a pogrom against Bombay's Muslim population.

At an everyday level, the new stresses in urban culture are enacted through an antagonism between alternative identities, idioms of belonging, modes of self-assertion: a collision between old local mythologies and new global ones, each distorted, fractured and re-shaped on impact with the other. The global is incarnated in the invitations of cyberspace, the flashy neon advertising logos of Nike, Benetton, Reebok and Microsoft, and the Coke-and-pizza youth subculture. The local is identified by the politics of ethnic segregationism promoted by regionalist-fascist parties like the Shiv Sena, the re-engineering of the sacred as a revanchist means of mass mobilisation through "mythological" television serials<sup>12</sup> and public religious observances that re-invent folk traditions of festivity.

Bombay gathers its icons from religion as well as from entertainment. Alongside the ancestral deities are glorified such cult figures as information technology wizards, pop singers, sports personalities, movie- and TV-stars. In Bombay's public sphere, the tele-guru Asaram Bapu, the politician Sonia Gandhi and the conjuror extraordinaire P.C. Sorcar represent three different but equally influential realms of wish fulfillment (Sorcar, incidentally, features in *Tomb's Day*, a witty 2001 triptych in which Dodiya explores the relationship between authority and make-believe, variously setting Sorcar, Clinton and Putin against the Taj Mahal, and characterising political power as the ability to produce convincing illusions).

Indeed, this simultaneity of mythological frames—their collision and mutation—points to the manner in which an Asian metropolis like Bombay generates many alternative and competing versions of modernity. Dodiya's art proceeds from a recognition of this phenomenon. In its affirmative register, it emphasises the vibrancy and inventiveness, the survival skills and opportunities imparted by metropolitan life. But in its critical register, it identifies the economic imbalances and social inequities of the postcolonial and globalised metropolis, the pathologies of fantasy gone wrong as crime, sexual desperation, narcissistic alienation. In other words, Dodiya's art dramatises the big city in its classic binary form: as a laboratory of emancipatory possibilities, but also as a terrifying labyrinth, with risks awaiting the unwary at every turn.

#### Software for the Hardware: Mapping Dodiya's Trajectories of Concern

One of the most spectacular narratives of Bombay in the 1990s involves the seesawing fortunes of share-market speculators at the Bombay Stock Exchange, puppets who were manipulated during that decade by a cartel of astute and unscrupulous brokers.<sup>13</sup> The steep escalation and equally steep descent in the value of scrips, the stratospheric buoyancy of hope and the suicidal darkness of despair, the tricky game of snakes-and-ladders that separated desperate men from their imagined wealth—such pivotal moments capture the seductive-destructive aspect of the *sona-kinagari* or "city of gold," as Bombay is colloquially known.

In its various avatars—as centre of the old mercantile and industrial economies, as base for the new finance and information economies—Bombay is quintessentially a game set and played between the poles of lack and fantasy. The metropolis is an economy of desire, in which the longed-for goals may be visible but not attainable; the imagination substitutes the consolation of dream for the thwarted wish, across socio-economic classes, in the city's movie halls, TV sessions, Internet chat-rooms and rave parties. Some objects of attention and landscapes of desire vanish behind guard-gated enclaves, while others are submerged in crowded inner-city ghettos, and no spatial search engine has been devised to locate them. Such factors, too, are intrinsic to an understanding of the topography and psychography of Atul Dodiya's metropolis.

In designing this exhibition, I have plotted these differentials of approachability, availability and attainability along a series of sight-lines: these are presented, deflected or blocked across a series of roller shutters, steps and screen devices, so that the exhibition space

becomes a theatre of surprises and half-glimpsed epiphanies. Indeed, the dominant visual motif of the exhibition is the *jali*: the filigree-screen, veil-wall or grille-gate, which simultaneously offers sight and denies access.

It appears in the form of the half-raised roller shutter and the perforated roller shutter, which partially reveal their images to the viewers, but hold them at a distance, and yet invite them closer. It appears, also, in the form of the collapsible gates: drawn across an approach axis, they act as speed-breakers regulating entry and exit. This dialectic of offering and denial, showing and withholding, is Bombay's leitmotif, both materially (in the disposition of urban built form) and morally (as predicament for the dispensation of justice and the distribution of resources). The sight-lines of viewing and approach that are laid out and cut in the gallery plan are metaphorical lines of desire.

In another sense, the *jali* is also an ubiquitous component of the makeshift architecture of Bombay's slums and shanty-towns, serving as a temporary place-boundary or storage unit. Dodiya's deployment of the *jali* motif, especially in the assemblages he constructs around ladders and playground slides, refers to this usage.

The ladders are associated with the "duplex shanties" that have come up along the tracks of Bombay's suburban railway system; and the playground slides remind us of the children deprived of leisure space in the metropolis, because plots set aside for playgrounds are steadily being denotified by the municipal authorities, in favour of the builder-driven development of apartment blocks, parking lots and supermarkets. Among Dodiya's assemblages, we also find ensembles of torn and bloodied shirtsleeves, photographs, newspaper cuttings and parts of imitation skeletons. Reminders of ethnic riots and class warfare, of the savagery and inequity that menace social life, these assemblages may even be regarded as "secular shrines"; through these, the artist threads a series of small tinted photographs, paintings and collages that carry intimate, autobiographical meanings.

If Dodiya's new experiments are developed, formally, around hardware "readymades," they also carry forward the six interrelated trajectories of artistic concern that he has followed since the mid-1980s. These trajectories, which intersect in various ways in the present exhibition, may be mapped as follows.

First, *an allegorical dramatisation of the problems of art-making*. This spectrum ranges from oil paintings as grand pictorial machines to enamel-on-laminate paintings that affront their bourgeois viewership with enigma and scatology. This trajectory includes paintings like *Sour Grapes* (cat.no.9); *Dadagiri* (cat.no.15); *Gangavataran: After Raja Ravi Varma* (cat.no.11); and *Highway: For Mansur* (cat.no.18). Encoding Dodiya's personal obsessions with canonical artworks, favourite painters and artistic ideologies, as they do, these paintings are literary in their structure and delight in self-reflexivity, historical referentiality and intertextuality.

Second, *the recovery, in an updated and postmodernist version, of such classic genres as the portrait and the landscape*. Dodiya's formal preoccupation here is with the slippage between figure and ground, resulting in a montage-like array of pictorial possibilities; invariably, under this project, he addresses such extreme conditions as loss, violence, disaster and grief, as evidenced by paintings like *Trans-Siberian Express for Kajal* (cat.no.8); *Lamentation* (cat.no.7); and *Man with Chakki* (cat.no.17).

Third, *autobiographical narrative*: paintings in which the artist's family and neighbourhood form the subject. The imperative, in works like *Letter from a Father* (cat.no.4) and *Douanier—My Father's Moustache and Other Stories* (cat.no.6), is that of intimacy: Dodiya secures the earliest habitats of his emotional life here: he draws, from childhood memory, such mnemonic details as the popular religious icons, the academic-realist landscapes, the folk-wisdom proverbs and parables, and then embroiders them with fictive images.<sup>14</sup>

Fourth, *the portrayal, simultaneously ironic and indulgent, of popular culture*. Dodiya charts, in paintings like *The Bombay Buccaneer* (cat.no.3); *Heroic Fiddling* (cat.no.5); and *Palace Guest* (cat.no.16), the realm of collective fantasies embodied in the comic book and the cinema. Dodiya's art employs images and formats from films, especially, both classic and popular: the cult films of Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and Mehboob Khan; commercial Hindi movies of the 1930s,

cast as Perso-Arabic fantasies or “mythologicals” based on the Hindu epics and folklore; and the super-kitsch and hyper-violence of Indian movies of the 1990s, which oscillated between chocolate-box heroes and wide-eyed heroines on the one hand, and cynical policemen and passionate terrorists on the other.

Fifth, *the lives of mystics, saints and charismatic leaders*: in paintings such as *Morning Walk on Juhu Beach* (cat.no.13) and *Honeycomb Triptych* (cat.no.20), Dodiya records the presence of saints on fire with divine passion or sparkling with wisdom-lore, like Francis of Assisi and Sri Ramakrishna; and political leaders who are venerated as saints, martyrs or gods, like Mahatma Gandhi and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. By this route, Dodiya investigates the myths of spiritual redemption or national salvation that sustain an embattled society.

Sixth, *the use of photographs*: originally, Dodiya treated photographs as visual references or source materials, pictorial “readymades” that gave him starting points for his images. Gradually, they have become archives of collective memory, and sometimes, insurance policies against collective amnesia, in his art. While they can activate nostalgia or melancholia, they also permit a reflection on the versionality of the past, the lacunae in remembrance, as when Dodiya turns the photograph into a base for a fictive palimpsest image of his own, as in paintings like *Bapu at René Block Gallery, New York, 1974* (cat.no.12) and *Sea-Bath (Before Breaking the Salt Law)* (cat.no.14).

In order to demonstrate the intersections among these trajectories, as well as the persistences and mutations of concern in Dodiya’s development, the structure of “Labyrinth/Laboratory” subsumes earlier works as well as works created specially for this exhibition, so that the display bears the aspect of retrospective as well as that of prospectus.

#### The Architecture of the Exhibition: Translating an Economy of Desire

Pursuing the cues offered by Atul Dodiya’s recent experiments, I have designed the present exhibition as a model or simulacrum of the urban situation and its experiential textures, its counter-Utopian spatial politics, social psychology and flexible architecture: the exhibition space has been translated into a maze of hybrid “object-spaces,” each an independent area of attention but linked organically to the whole. Each object-space is a constellation of assemblage, free-standing object, oil painting, watercolour or laminate painting.

Like the artworks themselves, the display formats are interactive and invite viewer-participation. While the exhibition will act as a spectacle that invites attention as a wrap-around environment, it will also create an estranging distance between itself and the viewers. I would hope that the viewers will be provoked into curiosity and inquiry by this simultaneous *interactivity* and *otherness* of Dodiya’s artworks—which are at once auratic art objects in a gallery space and emblems signifying their location in a postcolonial economy marked by fundamental asymmetries.

My intention, as curator, is to offer the viewers a variety of entries, exits and viewing angles to the exhibition. The criss-crossing of concerns in Dodiya’s work is mapped through a sequence of theatres created in the exhibition space of the Japan Foundation Forum; the logic of the exhibition, broadly, is one of movement from spaces of public symbolism to spaces of more private reverie. Beginning with *Fire Wall* (site-specific installation, cat.no.29), their first encounter with the exhibition, viewers would be introduced to the high colour and drama of public space in an Indian metropolis. They would pass, then, into the serenity, even austerity, of the “Gandhi room,” reflective of the personality of this central figure in India’s struggle for liberation from British colonial rule, who was tormented saint, untiring social activist and shrewd politician all at once.<sup>15</sup>

Then, entering the central chamber of the maze, the viewers would come face to face with the simulacrum of the metropolis, a crucible for the mutation of older mythologies and the creation of contemporary ones. The themes of the roller shutter images suggest an encyclopaedic vision of the postcolonial nation-state, failed but repressive, as well as of a civil society that has yet to emerge from a semi-feudal, semi-colonial society: spectacle and catastrophe, reality and art, pleasure and shock, are juxtaposed here to optimal effect. This sense of paradox and dialectic