

ENGLISH

GALLERIA CONTINUA

SAN GIMIGNANO BEIJING LES MOULINS HABANA ROMA SAO PAULO PARIS DUBAI

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# NIKHIL CHOPRA

## FIRE

GALLERIA CONTINUA | Paris - From February 3, 2023

GALLERIA CONTINUA is delighted to present Nikhil Chopra's first solo exhibition in the gallery's Parisian space, featuring works produced solely during his residency in Montmartre, marking ten years of a collaboration that began with an iconic performance by the artist in San Gimignano in 2012.

Nikhil Chopra, an international figure of contemporary art and a major artist on the dynamic cultural scene from Southeast Asia, is presenting a series of works created while living an immersive artistic adventure for six months in a Montmartre studio, which has become a repository of experiences and memories gathered with the public.

Initiating a pivotal change in his work, while each drawing is conceived in terms of its relationship to time and territory, the body - inspired by the artist's recent performances - is expressed for the first time within Chopra's characteristic landscapes, thus becoming landscape itself.

"To Embay, and to Embody."

A departure holds hope for an arrival, a return of bodies to landscapes they once traversed. Sometimes in flesh, and at times as spirits - specters of a past left incomplete or a homecoming to rest and recuperation. Even though time has its contingencies, the trace continues to survive. Land, like water, remembers everything that passes through it - a

condition of encounters and intimacies, violence and healing.

In Nikhil Chopra's exhibition *Fire* his many bodies return to new, familiar and strange landscapes. This return doesn't necessarily seek a resolution, but is a moment of reflection in times of transition for the artist, both physically and emotionally - a displacement from familiar ground and ecologies of care to the rigours and demands of a new, alien site.

Chopra's many beings are forged out of his insistence to embody instead of emulate. Once it's time, he undresses and washes up, setting these selves free into an orbit of beings. This act of letting go is ritualistic now - a method of chance and renunciation where they may or may not return. The landscape devoid of any presence of life, also nods to the possibility of wild worlds, untouched and thereby uncontaminated by the pressures of temporality, productivity and extraction. These seemingly pastoral, pristine visions concoct a resistance to the order of the world. Chopra doesn't shy away from this act of rebellion, a rewilding of thought and making, but also of suspension and/or slowing time.

The landscape is a different kind of protagonist in Chopra's work - one of memory and mountains, the home and the sea. While they have on many occasions formed the setting for his long, durational performances, his bodies have never occupied the drawings as bodies. They have

marked and rubbed, laboured, but never represented itself. This spillage of the body and the landscape onto each other also marks a moment of rupture, an incision on the time plane. This rupture presents the possibility for many pasts and futures to slip out. Here bodies in the twilight of the performance stretch and rest, rely and heal.

The explosions, eruptions and fire in Chopra's recent drawings represent many things - the forging of an idea or coming to terms with; a conflict and a desire; and states of unrest and discovery. Far in the distance, a fire fills Chopra's skies with clouds of smoke. There is courage to these gestures of bodies and flames breaking the considered rustle of wind and waves in his worlds and sometimes the contemplative silences they hold.

There is a forging with fire in the destruction and transformation of forms. A nod to the transience of natural things and sometimes its synthetic afterlives. To burn to ash, bark to coal and body to dust. These processes of purification and petrification are increasingly abused by processes of extraction. Chopra's charcoals take this dust of matter to return to mankind's precarious relationship to breath and toxicity. The smoke then also presents the landscape as a wasteland where the air of life is constantly threatened with combustible, petro gasses.

During his time in Montmartre, Paris, Chopra continues to gaze and graze. He strives to hold vastness as he frames the view from his window - buildings in a distance through a mesh of trees - a vision he lives with every waking day. Diaristic, but recurring like he was stuck in a time loop, the image continues to confuse time and its linearity. What if time's promise of passing is rendered invalid by the recurrence of an image? Landscapes like bodies in Chopra's work are from another time, they return as memories, flashes and dreams of place that were and those that will be.

It is hard to think about this body of work without the limitations and therein the beauty that acts of encounter and states of enchantment present. Enchantment is a tenet. One in which the mind is allowed to spill instead of gather, indulge instead

of make sense - to take it in as if it were air - a body to touch, a landscape to breathe." - Mario D'Souza, curator

Born in Kolkata, India, in 1974, Nikhil Chopra completed his art studies in the United States. He presented his first performances in Berlin, and continued his career abroad before returning to Goa, where he founded the iconic artist-run space, HH Art Spaces.

His work is included in major international collections and found in leading museums such as the TATE Modern in London, the MET in New York and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Chopra's artistic practice interweaves live art, drawing, photography, sculpture and installations. His performances, in large part improvised, dwell on identity and its construction, autobiography and authorship, the pose and self-portraiture. Nikhil Chopra's performances on the international art and theatre scene began in 2008 when the artist was invited to contribute to Time Crevasse (Yokohama Triennale, Yokohama), Kunstenfestivaldesarts Brussels, Making Worlds (53rd Venice Biennale), Performa (New Museum New York) and Marina Abramovic Presents (Manchester International Festival, The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester). After his one-year research fellowship at Interweaving Performance Cultures, Frei Universität Berlin in 2011, his work took him back to the Whitworth Art Gallery to make a solo project for the 2013 Manchester International Festival, where he received critical acclaim for his performance "Coal on Cotton". Between 2014 and 2017, he performed at the Kochi Muziris Biennale, Bienal de la Habana, the 12th Sharjah Biennial and Documenta 14. In 2019 he presented a nine-days long solo performance titled "Lands, Waters and Skies" for the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

Recently, he garnered notice at Asia Now, in the opulent setting of the Monnaie de Paris during the Paris Art Week, with his performance *Dancing with Myself*, questioning the arrival of war on the European continent.

Nikhil Chopra's works will also be presented by GALLERIA CONTINUA on the occasion of the gallery's participation in India Art Fair, a highlight of the art market in Southeast Asia.