

GALLERY HOP AROUND PARIS WITH NATALIE HEGERT

Our Sleeping Mind by Natalie Hegert

While I sleep

Le Laboratoire

4 rue du Bouloi, 75001 Paris,
France

February 13, 2009 - May 4, 2009



It may look a little funny but, they say that if at last the first letter and last letter of a word are left in the correct place, while the other letters are mixed up, our minds can make do, fill in the blanks and still read the words.



Shilpa Gupta's exhibition at Le Laboratoire, *While We Sleep*, explores the part of our brain that allows us this faculty--the unconscious brain which gathers and registers information we don't even know we've seen or heard, filling in the blanks and rearranging the missing info.

Gupta worked with Harvard University psychologist Mahzarin Banaji, who studies the cognitive unconscious through behavioral tests and neuroimaging. A huge proportion of our brain activity, up to 90%, is subconscious. If it were otherwise, says Banaji, we wouldn't be able to function properly; we wouldn't be able to tie our shoes if we had to think about each step and consciously activate each muscle involved. Our unconscious brain must take over for mundane tasks like these. Yet it's precisely on this unconscious level where our brains operate that our fears and prejudices arise, asserts Banaji, who developed the Implicit Association Test that reveals subconscious biases in its subjects. The test reveals prejudices towards race, gender and sexuality even in those who would contend they don't hold those prejudices--at least not consciously.

Shilpa Gupta, who lives in Mumbai, the site of recent terrorist attacks, believes it has become "so easy to hate" in contemporary India, and the Us/Other divide has given rise to a reactionary politics where fear reigns. If votes can be motivated by

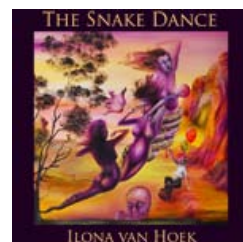
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unconscious prejudices, democracy fails and minorities receive little or no protection from the tyranny of the majority. For Gupta, the political cannot be separated from life or art, and her work is often characterized with a socio-political edge, dealing with issues of terrorism and globalism. For this exhibition, Gupta worked with Banaji to learn more about the part of our minds that produce fear and disgust, exploring the the concept of the unconscious, our sleeping mind and how it affects our social context.



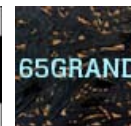
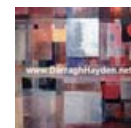
The installation is in a darkened room, as if you're physically walking into the deep and dark unconscious, a Freudian nightmare of sorts. The centerpiece of the exhibition is Singing Cloud, an amorphous cluster of black microphones, gathered together in an amoebic cloud, suspended from the ceiling. Rather than registering sound, the microphones are reverse-wired and emit a buzz and a song, the sounds traveling in rhythmic ripples over the surface, moving from one side of the cloud to the other. It's an eerie thing, and it calls out for us to "fly high high above", every once in a while whispering hushed words, "hindu", "muslim". Luckily it doesn't lapse into the kind of soundtrack as we know from the Tolerance Museum--the hallway you walk through as recorded voices yell or whisper racial epithets at you--but is more subtle and whimsical, and structurally very impressive. Across the room is a sign board, like the kind at train stations indicating arrivals and departures, flipping through different phrases, not randomly but in associative patterns, and in pointed groupings. One digit changes and the entire phrase means something different entirely.



I found it interesting that Gupta chose to work primarily with sound and text, rather than images or video when exploring these issues of the unconscious mind. It's as though we are not allowed to simply take in the images, react to them with our implicit associations, but we must take in the information through constantly changing or rearranged text, and we follow the invisible sound of the Singing Cloud with our eyes, forcing us to walk up to it and listen closer. It's almost as if she intended for us to stretch our minds out of our comfortable habits, the



Paul Russo



comfortable realm of our prejudices. In the Médiathèque we can stretch our minds further, undergoing the Implicit Association Test (you can also take it online at implicit.harvard.edu) and learning more about Banaji's and Gupta's experiments with the unconscious mind.

--Natalie Hegert

(*Images: Shilpa Gupta et Mahzarin Banaji, *While I Sleep*, February 13 - May 4, 2009; Le Laboratoire, © Marc Damage.)

Posted by [Natalie Hegert](#) on 2/23 | tags: [conceptual installation](#) [sculpture](#) [sound](#)

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A Poetic and Virtuoso Collaboration

by Natalie Hegert

We'll Know Where When We Get There

cneai

2 rue du Bac, Île des Impressionnistes, 78400 Chatou, France

February 8, 2009 - May 3, 2009



A short RER trip from Paris and a long pedestrian sidewalk on a busy highway bring you to CNEAI, located in Chatou on the flatteringly-named "Island of the Impressionists", a rather uninspiring ivy-banked tract of land in the middle of the Seine with a view of the passing barges and some industrial scenery. Perhaps it looks nicer out there when it's not winter, but there's no reason to wait until then to come out and see the exhibition by musician and poet Lee Ranaldo (from Sonic Youth) and video- and visual artist Leah Singer. Singer and Ranaldo have been collaborating together with sound and film for well over a decade, their principal work being the improvisatory live piece *Drift*, combining Ranaldo's droning guitar and beat-inspired poetry with Singer's "film-scratching".



Ranaldo's and Singer's exhibition at the CNEAI, *We'll Know Where When We Get There*, is the culmination of the artists' residencies in 2007 and 2008 at the CNEAI's *Maison Flottante*, and comprises of many parts: the visual exhibition itself, on view in the two levels of the gallery; performances by [John Giorno](#), [Rhys Chatham](#) and others on the inaugural day; a radio broadcast and related public event in April; and an album with artwork and liner notes by the curators. Besides the inaugural and radio performances, unfortunately the music is available only on a limited edition LP, and having no turntable in my abode here in Paris, I wasn't among the

willing to shell out 40 euros for the collector's item, so I admit that I haven't actually heard it yet.

Being on a cheaper budget, instead I contented myself with the ambitiously free performance on February 8th. I say "ambitiously free" because the organizers had perhaps underestimated the appeal of a free performance by "one of the dudes from Sonic Youth" and 60's chanteuse [Brigitte Fontaine](#) (judging from her reception by the crowd she was a huge draw), and by the end of the evening the steaming gallery was far beyond capacity, packed shoulder to shoulder with no space for the film projector, which was valiantly held aloft for the entire performance atop the head of a dedicated volunteer. True to form and expectation for a pioneer of experimental noise-rock, Lee Ranaldo played a guitar suspended from the ceiling, alternately banging it with drum sticks, drawing a violin bow over its strings, and setting it off like a pendulum over the heads of the crowd. Leah Singer's video accompaniment, besides being a bit shaky, was striking, slowed, ranging from concert footage to shots of trees and fireworks. I can't say much for Ranaldo's musical accompaniment, however, which consisted of an overzealous electric cello player in silver spaceman pants, and a [Lester Corncrake](#) look-a-like on electric bongos. Even the drug-ravaged Brigitte Fontaine looked like she was trying too hard, and it just wasn't working, her voice grating, reliving each and every cigarette she'd smoked over the decades. It started to get pretty weird and desperate toward the end. (See videos of the performances here. [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#))



Luckily, before the CNEAI got chokingly full of bodies, I got to actually take in the visual exhibition by Ranaldo and Singer, consisting of works on paper arranged in clusters on the walls of the lower-level galleries. It's interesting to note that the work is unaccompanied by texts or pointers as to who made which piece, and so we assume that the whole show is collaborative, as one might expect from the artist duo. Yet as one spends more time with the pieces, we find that there are several series in play, and their connection to each other is not readily apparent or observable. Singer's experiments with, etchings, serigraphs and embossing, imprinting patterns on paper, are along very different lines than Ranaldo's newspaper paintings and monotypes. It seems that during their residency, Ranaldo was working on his stuff, and Singer was working on hers. It doesn't not work, however, and the works aren't entirely incohesive, but the show does feel a bit premature perhaps, as if the works are still in the experimental phase.



The most successful of them are Singer's gorgeous embossings on colored paper, richly textural and delicate,

and Ranaldo's monochromatic paintings overlaid with bright, stencil-letter text, which lapse from the poetic to the conversational. But the real treat of the exhibition is found upstairs in the video room, where you can sink in and enjoy the intensely poetic, virtuosic, collaborative films; *Hoarfroats*, *Drift*, *Blind Performance*, *Here* and *ILOVEYOUIHATEYOU*; that highlight just how well these two work together. It's an enveloping experience, and where you should spend most of your time at the show. These are impressive works of art: their sounds and musical reverberations, personal stories and poems, compelling images and beautiful sequences will make a deep impression. What will stay with me personally, is a scene of leafless trees in a strong wind, with the film ever-so-slightly slowed, capturing the poetic beauty of this copse of trees bending and swaying, their strong branches more flexible than you could imagine, so resilient and so dynamic.



On the 26th of April at 22:10, *We'll Know Where When We Get There*, will be aired on Radio France Culture. Bring your transistor radios to the CNEAI for a live, public event.

--Natalie Hegert

(*Images, from top to bottom: Lee Ranaldo, Leah Singer, *We'll Know where When We Get There*, February 8 - *Drift* (2006). Lee Ranaldo, *Infinite* (2008), *Lace* (2008), gaufrage nu sur papier. Lee Ranaldo, *Random* (2008), monotype.)

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Heavenly Projections by Natalie Hegert

Eglise du Val-de-Grâce

1, place Alphonse Laveran
Paris 75005



While riding my bike home one night on rue St Jacques I looked up at the Val de Grâce and lo and behold, heavenly projections moved across the façade of the church. It's worth pulling over and watching for a while, as images of angels and saints in brilliant hues move across the Baroque architecture. The nightly projections, designed by Italian artist Gianfranco Lannuzzi, are in conjunction with the Giotto exhibition inside and will continue until May 11. More information can be found [here](#).

--Natalie Hegert

(*Image: Projection on the Église du Val-de-Grâce, photo by Natalie Hegert.)

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