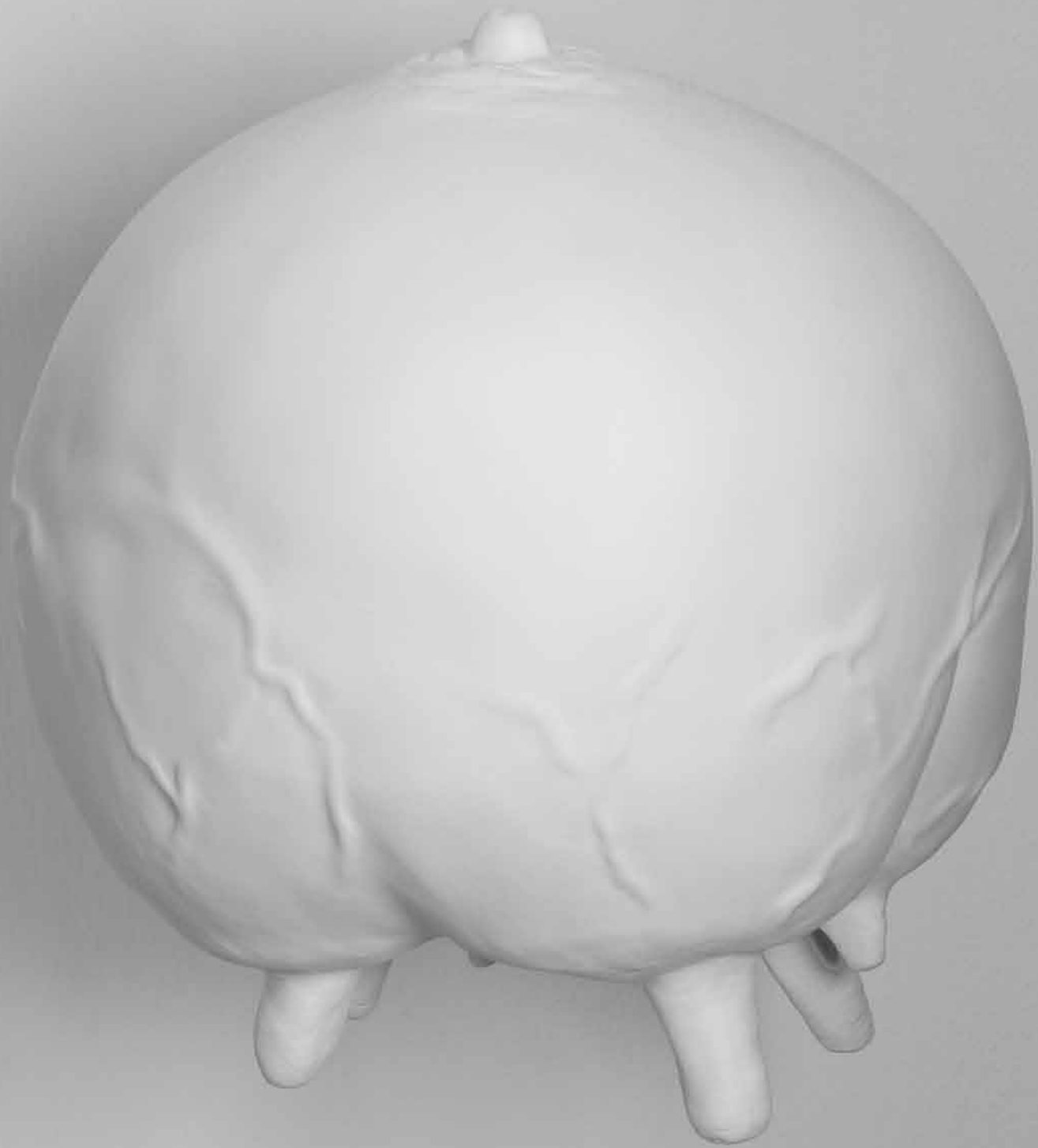


PRUNE NOURRY

HOLY
DAUGHTERS



JOURNAL OF A HAPPENING

If I were to define Prune's personality and her art is this mantra:
"Be daring, be first, be different, be right."

Prune is fearless. When I first met her, she almost immediately asked me for a strand of my hair as a sample for an artwork she was doing about the human body ...

What is audacity in art? Pertinence and impertinence in a given context. Prune has chosen a controversial topic: that of selective abortion in India ... and although she has no prior expertise in this field, she is friendly and persistent, and met with many different people, all related one way or another, to this dramatic subject.

Art aims at transgression to break new ground but nowadays, it does not go very far: it is mostly ritualized and framed. Prune is a risk-taker, willing to roll the dice with her reputation on the line to bring to fruition a project that crosses many different disciplines: art, sociology, medical science, anthropology, philosophy. Bold are those who cross disciplines, and she has done this for a couple of years in relation to this specific project which has involved a great deal of homework and research on the different aspects of the topic.

Through the selected art works, Prune asserts her own vision through her imagination and ability to transform matter into sculptures and pictures. There is something extreme in her work: it is pure, even if it highlights hybridism while redefining modern humanism as only art can. There is no sacrilege in her *Holy Daughters*. Audacity is not provocation, even if it transgresses aesthetic standards and codes.

Her boldness is humble, a very physical and very moving experience. The variety of mediums, the use of scientific devices, the grassroots experience of Indian streets ... Prune is questioning forms of human behaviour. With great respect and affection for the Indian culture, she puts into perspective attitudes, which that so often threaten the wellbeing of girls and women.

While wishing to make a point about human behaviour, as well as taking full responsibility for this venture, Prune shows that though plans are pointless, planning is indispensable. She wanted the three of us to collaborate on this exhibition: the artist, a curator and a collector, independents. Together we found an interesting venue for our pop-up exhibition that makes Prune's iconoclastic art even more appealing.

To those who find presumptuous Prune's ambition to try making a better world, one could argue that the optimist knows how the world is perfectible.

Tatyana Franck, art curator.

NOT WANTING DAUGHTERS IN INDIA

by Ravinder Kaur
Professor of Sociology and Social Anthropology,
Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, India
12th December, 2010

India and China, two populous Asian nations, share a common dysfunctionality – both have adverse sex ratios. That is, in both societies, there are fewer women than men which is the opposite of most other countries in the world. Since the 1980s, when sex determination through ultrasound technology became popular and widespread, the number of girls being allowed to take birth fell dramatically.

Thus, in India, the child sex ratio (ages 0-6) or the number of girls being born for every 1000 boys fell from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001. This fall was very dramatic in the northern and north-western parts of India which have historically been known for skewed sex ratios, achieved through female infanticide –the killing of baby girls soon after their birth. In 2001 northern states such as Punjab and Haryana showed declines of 82 and 59 points. These two states are the most prosperous states of India, with very high per capita incomes.

One might wonder why rich states in India don't want daughters. Can they not afford them? Why should they discriminate against girl children if they are well off? Some other questions also come to mind –why has this trend worsened in the modern era? Should gender inequality and discrimination not go down with all the improvements in education, health and income? Historically, this has been the trend in most countries, so why not in India and China?

It becomes very important to ask and answer these questions as we try to arrest this negative and unfair trend. India's next census is due in 2011 and will tell us whether the immense efforts put in by government, NGOs, activists and scholars have had any effect on reducing this form of gender discrimination. In a later section, I look at recent estimates of sex ratios at birth (number of girls and boys being born) across India to see if there is improvement or deterioration –what does the future hold?

Modern technology and modern family

One must try and locate this problem of 'missing' or 'unwanted' daughters in the present context of the confluence of how modern technology is affecting the making of the modern family. Most Indians have been tutored by the Indian government's family planning messages –“Hum do, Hamare do” meaning, “Us two, our two”. This was the definition of the modern family with only two children. However, while Indians have accepted this norm, they continue to prefer to have boys

rather than girls. Here, modern technology has helped them immensely. With technological interventions such as amniocentesis, chromosomal sorting (a pre-conception sex selection technology) and scans with the help of ultrasound machines, it has become very easy to either implant a fetus of the sex one wants or determine the sex of the fetus in the womb. The most popular and cheap of these technologies has been ultrasound. It is non-invasive and easily available. Indeed it has spread to the whole country and everyone knows what use it can be put to. With the introduction of this technology in the 1980s, the number of girls being born began to fall, rapidly declining to unfortunate proportions.

Thus, modern technology which was meant to detect fetal abnormalities is being used to eliminate daughters, leading to a worse gender imbalance. Being modern is seen as having a small family and using technology to achieve the gender composition one wants. The more educated and rich you are, the better you are able to do this!

As a result, between 1981 and 2005, an estimated 10 million sex selective abortions took place. Some parts of India still have female infanticide –in 2004, a northern state of India, Uttar Pradesh (as large as Germany) contributed 16.7% of the infanticides. Poor states, where people cannot afford scanning and abortions, still may eliminate girls through primitive methods such as leaving the new born baby out in the cold, or putting poison into her mouth, or drowning her in a river.

Present and Future Trends

To arrest the alarming trend, the government, NGOs and activists have taken many steps over the last ten-fifteen years. The government introduced the PNDT (pre-natal diagnostic techniques prevention and misuse) Act in 1994 and further strengthened it in 2002 to cover prevention of pre-conception sex selection. It also introduced many 'girl child' schemes to encourage families not to eliminate daughters. These cover education of girl and her maintenance. One very popular scheme is called “Ladli” or “beloved daughter” scheme. There have been campaigns and advocacy, which try to celebrate the birth of the girl child and raise her value.

However, many of these measures have not been very successful. Hardly any doctors have been prosecuted for misusing ultrasound and carrying out abortions to eliminate female fetuses. The girl child schemes

may have helped a little in raising awareness but we have to wait until the next census to gauge the real success of these steps.

What do sex ratios at birth between 2004 and 2006 show us? The diagnosis is based on the work of Prof. Kulkarni of JN University in Delhi. The picture still does not look very good. Only two out of twenty Indian states (or provinces) had a normal sex ratio –above 950. The rest have fewer girls being born. The alarming part is that although the sex ratio at birth is improving slightly in the very bad states, it is deteriorating in places where it was fine earlier. Thus, the south of India has generally had good sex ratios; but now many southern states are showing declines in sex ratios at birth. Thus, the clear North-South divide is not there any more.

If adverse sex ratios were associated with northern culture, why are now they moving towards central, eastern and southern India? What new factors are coming into play? To understand this, we have to see the old and new reasons for not wanting daughters.

Cultural reasons: old and new?

Some of the reasons for not wanting daughters have been –the need to pay dowry at the marriage of the daughter, guard her virginity until marriage as that would affect the honour of the family; investing in daughters does not bring any returns to her natal family while investing in boys does (it is like “watering the other's garden” as upon marriage the daughter will be of use only to her husband's family)– daughters are thus seen as an economic and social burden.

In modern times, as the age at marriage has gone up and as people prefer educated daughters-in-law, parents have to invest more in daughters. This makes them more expensive and less attractive as children. Dowry which was less popular in the south and east has become more common as women move from rural to urban areas with salaried husbands and become housewives rather than workers. This leads to their being perceived as non-productive ‘mouths to feed’ which in turn leads to a demand for dowry as compensation for their ‘uselessness’; this further leads to unwantedness of daughters.

Consequences

At the moment, the most glaring consequence of shortage of girls and women is the shortage of brides. By 2030, 25 million women would be missing from the marriageable age group and in north and north-west India

there will be 15% excess males of marriageable age (Christophe Guilmo, UNFPA 2007).

Already, the shortage of brides in the north is resulting in men seeking girls from other parts of the country and from other countries –these couples are like strangers to each other– language and culture differs completely. In some cases the brides are bought and sometimes all brothers share one wife.

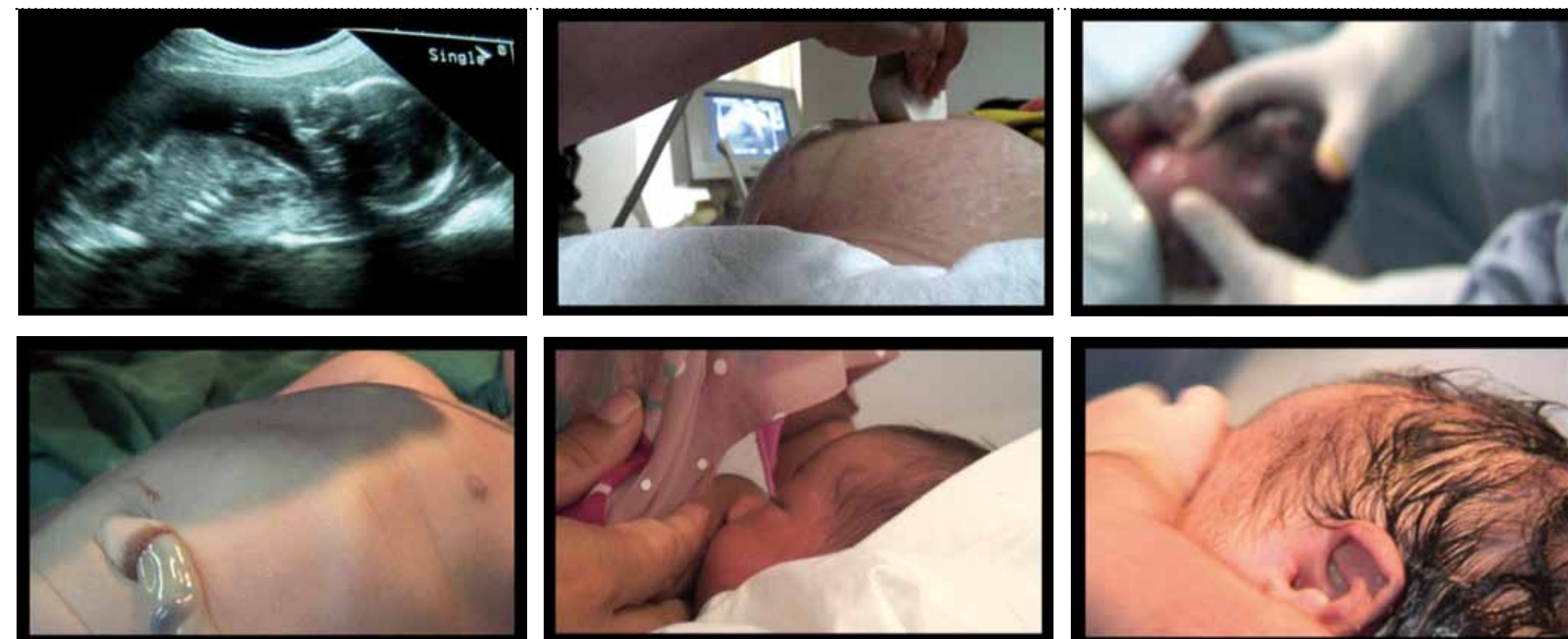
While this is not a good trend for the brides who have to make all the adjustments, there may be unintended positive consequences. Some such marriages are without dowry, across caste, region and religion, leading to breakdown of some of these rigidities.

Conclusion

Prune Nourry's project on *Holy Daughters* is thus a very valuable contribution which brings focus on this alarming aspect and trend in Indian society. She has tried to tell the country that just as it considers female cows holy, it should extend the same holiness to its daughters –who are equally valuable as living beings. Without daughters there can be no human reproduction –hence, no life! Women are the source of fertility and nurturance and we cannot eliminate them because by doing so we are damaging the very branch that human life sits upon.

Her project brings up the ethics of technological interventions in human reproduction and therefore in human life. It is very evocative and makes people think about very fundamental ethical and sociological questions - human rights, rights of women, pretense of technology to be value-neutral and other important issues.

Sociologically, through public art, it makes people think about their relationships, who and what they want as children and why daughters are valuable to them. This makes for a positive step in people's thinking. Hence, art influences society in the right ethical direction.



“When i had my first child, (...) my mother-in-law thought i was pregnant of a girl, so they kicked me out. (...) but it was a boy, so i got back there. After (...) almost a year, I was pregnant again, and my mother-in-law did the abortion at home.”

Mary, Haryana district, September 2009.



“For the medical practitioner, he's absolutely sure what he's doing is wrong, ethically wrong, medically incorrect, but yet he does it for money.”

Puneet Bedi, Gynecologist, Delhi, March 2009.

“We have found, from a study that we did, in some villages, maybe only 500 girls to 1000 boys...”

Ravinder Kaur, sociologist, Delhi, March 2009.

“Infanticide —killing of daughters— was there even hundred years back! Now we have a more human method, thanks to technology. So I call it a marriage, an holy alliance, between tradition and technology.”

Ashish Bose, Demographer, Delhi, March 2009.

All photos
Pictures extracted from the documentary *“Holy Daughters, story of a sex selection”* directed by Prune Nourry during two journeys in India in 2009. This video of researches was made to prop up the *“Holy Daughters”* artwork through interviews of Indian Scientists and women, in Rajasthan and Delhi.

VOICES OF THE STREETS

by Christine Ithurbide

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5th December, 2010

The very strength of Prune's sculptures stands in their inextricable and powerful links tied with contemporary societies. Rising from a deep interest in genetic, procreative techniques and bioethics questions, her artworks present a new approach of these issues and an important reflection on the ways to confront the public with these universal concerns. The *Holy Daughters* project is rooted in a long research process the artist has been pursuing since 2004 in many countries (United States, Switzerland, England, Japan, India...), as well as in a new vein exploring one particular social context, re-envisioning the global/local relation in contemporary art practices. Far from an exotic and naïve interpretation of India, Prune, as an anthropologist, realized field studies and interviewed scientists, demographers and above all Indian women. This truly comprehensive approach enabled her to create an art project not only for a western audience, but first of all for a local public.

Just installed in the street, the *Holy Daughters* appealed inhabitants' curiosity and triggered a sudden gathering of people. The link between the Gau Mata (sacred cow), the milk, the motherhood and women's life conditions was made naturally by the passersby coming from a wide range of social classes,

street sellers, administrative employee, policemen, students and mothers with their children. Though at first sight intimidated, most of them had rather friendly reactions and caressed her nose in sign of respect. Many of them were struck by the parallel between the sweet and innocent eyes of a cow and the one of a little girl, whereas others feel pity and even fear. They developed a wide range of personal interpretations, dealing with mythology references but also urban and poverty issues, thinking that the sculpture denounced bad living conditions in cities. For others, the *Holy Daughter* was a sign of men disrespect toward Nature, cows and eventually women. But it was above all young men who manifested their awareness and worries concerning the problem of sex selective abortion and its consequences. They were afraid about not finding a woman to get married. In a country where this debate is very much uncovered by the media, Prune was able to point it out through dialogue and in a subtle manner rather than being provocative.

A striking detail interestingly emerges from the photography of the crowd on the first day installation: there was not even one woman standing in the frame of the picture. While the central issue of the art project is the lack of sixty million women, due to the increasing sex selection phenomenon to the detriment of girls, the street scene embodied

spontaneously this reality and in a particular relevant manner.

The success of this happening resulted from both a long reflection on the form of the sculptures, nourished by references to Indian literature, religion and visual arts, and on their localization in the city. The spots, carefully chosen, shared the presence of milk booth, a white and blue little urban shop where people come every day to fill their milk pot or buy some fresh lassi (popular and traditional yogurt based drink). Located in different neighborhoods of Delhi, the four milk booths responded to the necessity of creating a link between the sculpture and the urban life around. Any inhabitant, men or women, who came by walking or by bike for this daily routine, attended this event. Waiting in the line, they would just glance at the sculpture more or less discreetly, and then come closer, ask questions and even attempt to lift her. This interactive process affirmed the shift from traditional elitist art exhibiting places to open space environments in order to meet an audience unfamiliar with contemporary art. Prune took a rather courageous and engaged way, reactivating the strong link between art and life rooted in Indian society.

With the *Holy Daughters*, Prune has stepped into a large debate opened by Indian artists on the paradoxes and sensitive issues

raised in rapidly developing countries such as India. Shilpa Gupta, in *Your Kidney Supermarket*, 2004, denounces the abuses of scientific practices, while Anita Dube with *Silence*, (*Blood wedding*), 1998 and Sureka in the series *Space of Silence*, 2007, deplore women's living conditions. But the topic of missing girls remain quite absent of contemporary Indian art subject.

The *Holy Daughters* happening will remain an unexpected meeting and unforgettable experience for the lucky ones who saw it. Most likely, it will keep raising many interrogations among Indian people as this issue is not resolved yet. Prune's project definitely highlights the importance of displaying contemporary art in public space in India and conveys new perspectives of approaching the relation between art, science and women's rights in contemporary India.



Photos 1-5
Happening in New Delhi - Day 1
Milk Booth №14 - Haus Khas, New Delhi, India.

Photos 3-8-10
Happening in New Delhi - Day 2
Milk Booth №75 - Panschilla park, New Delhi, India.

Photos 2-6
Happening in New Delhi - Day 3
Milk Booth №138 - JNU, New Delhi, India.

Photos 4-7-9
Happening in New Delhi - End
Milk Booth №25 - Nizamuddin East, Delhi, India.

Photo 11 (next page)
Happening in New Delhi - Day 1
Milk Booth №14 - Haus Khas, New Delhi, India.



"In this patriarchal society, if you are a girl having a relationship with a boy, it's taken as an insult. To prevent that insult, they kill from the beginning."



"This is a bacchi-bacchari."



"Nature have his own way of creating a balance, and those who are against Nature I'm against them."







This page and the next one
Pictures extracted from the video "Holy Holi" directed by Prune Nourry.
The scene takes place in a 'gaushala', sort of home, refuge or hospital
for holy cows.



INTERROGATING THE DIVINE: THE UBIQUITOUS COW AND THE HOLY DAUGHTERS

by Malvika Maheshwari
 Doctoral researcher working on 'freedom of expression of artists in India'
 at the Centre d'Études et de Recherches Internationales (CERI), Paris.
 Also teaches Indian Politics at Sciences Po.
 9th December, 2010

Gau or the cow has been regarded as a basic source of life and living in India in recognition of its synthesis of physical energy and the mythological, religious and spiritual beliefs. The diverse manifestations of the cow that have over the centuries proliferated, declined and been revived share a common transcendental impulse. Although it manifests a strong foundation of physicality in a predominantly agrarian economy, the celebration of the gau is, in origin, in veneration and in intention, a religious exercise. Its mainspring is Hinduism and its vast reservoir of myths, legends, rituals and folklore.

The cow became important in India from the Vedic period onwards (1500 - 900 BC) as a symbol of divine wealth. For the Vedic man cows were "the 'real life' substratum of the goods of life," writes J. C. Heesterman. The verses of the Atharva and the Rig Veda celebrate the gau as a goddess and in feminine relation with other gods: as the mother of Shiva, daughter of Vasu and the sister of Aditi's children. Therefore by being on earth, the cow, as the Veda mentions, only brought welfare to the ordinary mortals.

woman and the cow thus enumerated. In the Aryan culture, it was the young girls and women of the household who were given the task of tending to the cows like milking, cleaning and praying. Such essentializing comparisons have tended to place both- the woman and the cow at a mythical divine place: as that which is pure and to be prayed: the gau as the mother and the woman as a devi, mother India etc. leading more often to their veneration or abuse rather than they being holders of real power or writers of their own destiny.

Situating the work in a socio-political context, in recent years freedom of expression of artists in India has been challenged by politically motivated violence and a disturbed modernity, especially works touching upon the issue of the Indian woman or religion. Prune's does both. While it is a hope that this exhibition triggers debate, interest and awareness, it does so in a non-violent manner. As vigorous and sensitive as ever, Prune follows the rituals related to the cow, hears the songs of lament and joy, attends to the voices of worship as they break down the barricades of the world and invite us to reflect, enjoy and appreciate.

May the cows sit in our dairies and may the abode echo with her beautiful words;
"May these cows of different colors give birth to many calves and by the grace of Indra, may they be milking."
 (Atharva Veda, 4/ 21)



This great reverence among the Hindus towards their 'holy' cows, of regarding the animal as gau mata (mother cow), as gau dhan (wealth), as adhanya (that which should not be killed) and the belief that the entire universe is but a reflection of the cow supreme, forms the broader context in which we can situate and understand Prune's sensitive work. The mainspring of the artist's reflection that follows from this, links the aspect of gau to the world, politics, society and subversion of women in India, thereby underlining the irony in the title 'Holy Daughters.'

Reflective of the irony of the fate of women in India: of being simultaneously admired, abused and marginalized, or offering prayers to the gaumata for the birth of a son, Prune's expressions through the metaphor of the cow give tangible representation of a parallel, harsh reality. Prune invites us to consider her stylized, graceful and yet interrogative expressions through which India's Hindus express their hopes and desires, their magical sense of connection with the cows as guardian deities whom they worship. However, as the community altered its customs, reverence for the cow accompanied their neglect, and considerations of the girl child as a devi fell silent before the seductions of a male heir.



Prune has committed herself to the circuit of creativity and documentation; the artist discovering the reality of her own imagination must also assist others to recover the power to imagine their own realities. Reinterpreting the lore of the past, Prune's 'Holy Holi' installation, in her words, 'is about the traditional celebration of Holi, which symbolizes fertility through Spring, but in fact not so many women can participate as the celebrations can be violent being more a party for men finally. Holi is also Krishna's celebration: Krishna is the gaupala, so cow protector, and in a way fertility protector. The celebration is here symbolized by milk instead of colored water, and milk powder instead of colored pigments...like a new version of celebration of fertility.'

"There is a place for cows, they are valuable, but no place for girls. She's not valued, everyone feels unhappy when a girl is born. (...)
People worship the cow, and even the girl they call her deity, but in case of the women it's just words."

Karuna, Ajmer, September 2009.

"Cows and women, as long as they are useful they are valued. Cow is cared for until she gives milk but women are never cared for. It's better to be a cow than a women."

Padma, Ajmer, September 2009.

HYBRID

Prune Nourry interviewed by Dominique Rousset, journalist, producer at France Culture. She published with Axel Kahn “La Médecine du XXI^e siècle: des gènes et des hommes”, Bayard, 1996, and “Un goût de Miel”, Seuil, 2008. 20th December, 2010

D.R. | How would you locate the *Holy Daughters* in your career?

P.N. | It is a work born from a number of questions I had raised very young about the border between man and animal, and on the definition of human being. The *Bébés Domestiques* (*Pet Babies*) were already an illustration of these issues. Indeed, to consider your pet like your child is a sociological phenomenon that is observed everywhere, in France, Japan, California ... I wanted to illustrate this very contemporary phenomenon, but which could also be part of the past – in 1900, when world fairs were exposing humans in zoos, and in 1945 they were used as experimental animals – and of the future.

D.R. | But this project was especially about taking a critical look at society through the use of humor and a form of provocation. With the *Procreative Dinner*, and now the *Holy Daughters*, you came to more fundamental questions about the power of science. Does this really feel like a natural progression for you?

P.N. | I made the link with genetics when I became interested in hybrid embryos and I wanted to meet Stephen Minger, director of research on stem cells at King's College, London. This issue of hybrid embryos led me to get excited about bioethics, a theme already strongly embedded in the *Bébés Domestiques*.

D.R. | The meeting with Stephen Minger was decisive?

P.N. | Yes, and since, I continue to meet with scientists to get a grasp on subjects I do not fully comprehend, and discover a world that, until then, was impervious to me. I then approach these matters from a particular angle, the philosophy of science. That's what interests me in art, being at the crossroads of several paths, taking a look at the scientific, philosophical and sociological aspects of a given topic.

D.R. | Between the *Bébés Domestiques* and the project *Holy Daughters* in India, there were the *Diners Procréatifs* (*Procreative Dinners*). What meaning do you give to this project?

P.N. | The *Diners Procréatifs* are for me an introduction to what I will do next. I see the *Holy Daughters* as a first step. I want to address all these issues in an accessible way, without dramatization or being systematically critical. The outcome should be reflection. Thus, the interaction with the public is also a crucial aspect of my work. *Procreative Dinners* and the *Bébés Domestiques* are at the border between humor and seriousness. I do not want to provoke for provocation, I look rather towards building a relationship with people to get them interested in my project.

D.R. | You say you are looking to take people with you, to alert them, so there is a political goal?

P.N. | Political yes, but rather in the etymological sense. There are certain things I strongly feel one cannot do. For example, I am against putting a price on a body part, it must remain a donation. Whether it affects an organ, blood, sperm, or babies in regards to adoption or surrogacy. From the moment you introduce a monetary value, deviation begins.

D.R. | So, as a first step, *Holy Daughters* brings up new issues in your body of work. How do you envision your evolution?

P.N. | I will be in the U.S. this year, and do, in fact, wish to pursue other themes. I do not want to impose rules on my work, but surely, I will continue to work on bioethics. Questioning, for example, normality and abnormality and how one can decide that their child is abnormal because it has a squint or is hemophilic ...

D.R. | What are you waiting for the public in this exhibition? Because your work is also built on people's reactions, such as when you put your sculpture in the street?

P.N. | I hope they will find it both coherent and eclectic. For me, there are two ways to go about it. The first is to meet people, enter their world, understand it, and then take the results I have collected from this interaction to the street for all to see. I also like to depict a universe created from my own research, and this time, it's the public who enters my world. These are two complimentary steps and there cannot be one without the other.

D.R. | Are the public's reactions likely to make you evolve?

P.N. | Yes, definitely. It helps my message evolve and find new ideas. I learned to free myself from the desire to provide a frame for people who discover my work, otherwise they do not appropriate it. If they like a work more than an other, maybe it's because it triggers something in their personal history. That's what I try to learn from their reactions, to touch them with what is their own and that I do not grasp.



— PRUNE NOURRY

Breeding season of species. Among 200 millions of spermatozoa, only a few hundred cross the uterine tube. The spermatozoon X is one of them. The ovocyte X is waiting patiently that natural selection takes place.

Prune Nourry shout out her first cry in Paris at January 30, 1985. Artist in gestation, she studied *in vitro* the Ecole Boule, speciality wood sculpture.

Since 2004, her studio is a laboratory for genetics hybridization. She procreates new species halfway between Human and Animal, allegories of the contemporary Science which leads to an artificial selection of the Human.

Prune Nourry lives and works between Paris and New York. Bachelor in the prestigious School of Art and Design Ecole Boule, she had happenings and exhibitions in France, Belgium, Japan, England and United States. In 2011, she is invited for a six months residency in the art center The Invisible Dog, New York, U.S.

www.prune-art.com

D.R. | How would you like to be perceived by the scientific community? Is it important to you?

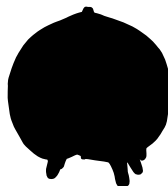
P.N. | It's important for me to be in contact with them, yes, and be taken seriously. Because this bridge between science and art interests me, I like the idea of a mutual exchange. They bring me answers, and I hope that in return, they may see art as a way to engage the public to raise important questions.

D.R. | You certainly act as an artist in what you do here, but don't you have the feeling of going beyond your art?

P.N. | I don't know, being an artist isn't it precisely trying to go beyond the boundaries and conventions? The challenge lies in going deep enough without risking to get lost. That's why it's important to substantiate my research.

D.R. | By creating a hybrid girl/holy cow, you wanted to emphasize the difference in treatment between them? Was this your starting point?

P.N. | It is much more paradoxical than that. In India, cows are sacred, but are abandoned. Similarly, in the collective imagination, women are also considered pure and sacred, and the term *Holy Daughters* may seem quite logical there. However, the image of purity can backfire for women.



This journal is a work in progress: first stage of a complete book on the *Holy Daughters* project, which will be edited further to the exhibition.

THANK YOU!

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PHOTOS

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Happening: JR / Prune Nourry
Video extracts: Prune Nourry
Prune's portrait: Baudouin

GRAPHIC DESIGN

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