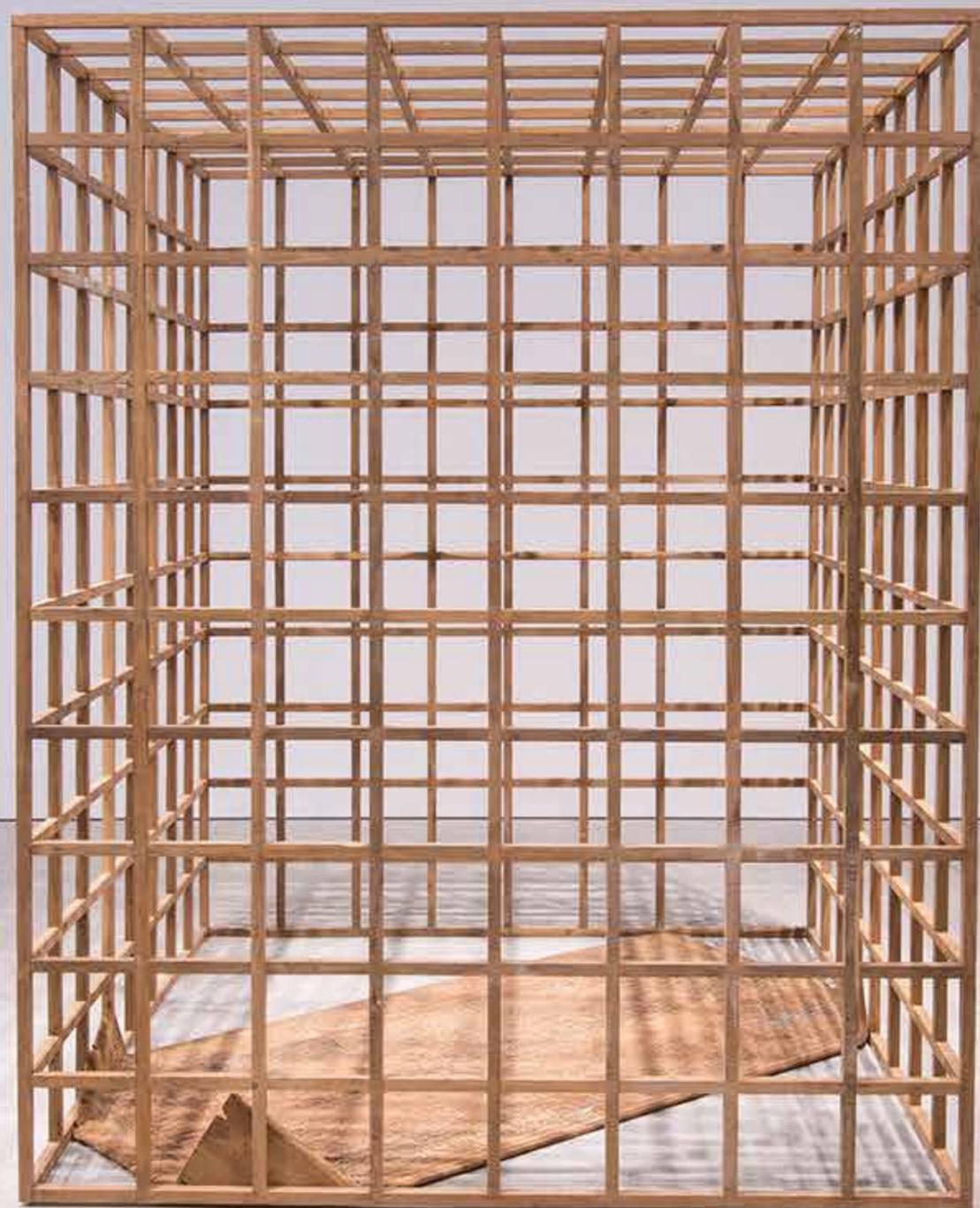


SUDARSHAN SHETTY



Untitled, 2017
Recycled teak wood
182.9 x 182.9 x 228.6 cm, 203.2 x 101.6 x 30.5 cm

SUDARSHAN SHETTY
A SONG, A STORY &
THE EMPTY VESSEL



NEW TELLINGS; NEW BODIES
BY NEGAR AZIMI



New Tellings; New Bodies

"This world is a house made of wood, and, lo! it is burning furiously."

-Kabir

As a child, the artist Sudarshan Shetty happened upon a popular folktale which was part riddle, part lesson. Drawn from a South Indian tradition, the narrative centers upon a woman who wakes one day having lost the song and the story she holds within her, but that she has never shared. The pair have not disappeared, but rather, they've escaped through her breath and assumed the unlikely form of an umbrella and a shoe. Her husband comes home to find said foreign objects on the doorstep. Leery, for—to whom do these phantom objects belong?—he feuds with his befuddled wife, then sets out on a long walk. On the walk, he encounters a pavilion bedecked with lamps and takes a seat. The lamps chatter; they've retired from the quotidian work of illumination to swap stories about the lives they've born witness to that day. Eavesdropping, the man comes to know the truth of the song and the story. A resolution, perhaps. He heads back home, penitent, and explains what has come to be to his wife. Puzzlingly, she has no memory of either song or story. They live on, nevertheless, as ghostly apparitions, traces. Was it Marcel Duchamp who coined the portmanteau guest + host = ghost?

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The two-channel work *A Song, A Story* revisits the classic folktale in the form of a video installation. One screen opens with an expanse of water—a lake or the sea, perhaps—misted over and surrounded by dense foliage. Another screen captures a village populated by houses and their mishmash tin and tile roofs. The village is presumably in the same sea-side setting, and the homes' construction is more or less slapdash, humble. One screen offers the postcard view, the other the close-up.

The camera settles on one structure in particular. It is not dilapidated like the others, but rather, has been fashioned from literally hundreds of pieces of individual wood of eclectic texture and provenance. Inside this unusual hybrid structure, a woman gazes wistfully out the window. Is she looking at the sea? Possibly. She stretches out on a canape of ambiguously organic, even extravagant design. She dozes desultorily, then flips through cartoons—for suddenly, there is a television within the structure. Nearby, a string instrument lies untouched, unplayed. Soon, the inside of the room appears on the television screen itself. As if it, too, is part of the continuum, part of the life of the folktale. Nothing escapes; everything finally succumbs to representation.

The scene cuts. An elderly man appears. He has the avuncular air of a kind pedagogue. Another woman—she is young—appears at his side. He begins to weave a story; it is the one we began with. The disciple listens, dutiful, rapt, as the folktale perfumes the very site of its unfolding:

In a distant land a woman had buried in her heart a song so sweet a story so grand, but the song and the story were wasting away ...

On the next screen, the protagonist-wife, now horizontal, levitates, Tarkovsky-style, several feet above the ground.

A Song, A Story continues in this (surreal) manner. The pedagogue and his disciple vanish. The husband comes home and is flabbergasted by the sight of the interloping objects outside his door. He chastises his wife, then the camera follows him as he makes his way through a rural landscape and stumbles upon the pavilion filled with motley lamps. Its design, like that of the home, is unusual—familiar and unfamiliar at once; a typically Islamic dome, with elements of Hindu temple architecture, too. It is an odd architectural confection, a mongrel creation. In the pavilion, the husband meditates, then tumbles backwards into a small ceremonial pool. The lamps, we imagine, chatter. The tale, by now familiar, continues. And yet Shetty's inventive refashioning takes the original folktale to fresh territory—mediated by film, a heightened surrealism, as well as the lapses of time and space afforded by the dual channel installation. There is more: originally a South Indian tale, we learn that it has been retold in Braj Bhasha, a literary language of north and central India. In other words, a parable about the loss of tradition has assumed a new life through its retelling. There is a lesson here about permanence; it is not the obvious one.

**

For years, Shetty has roamed the junkyards and secondhand markets of Mumbai. His early work revealed in the possibilities afforded by such adventures, offering an art of bric a brac pastiche that held a mirror up to an India that is born of multiple faiths, traditions, and instincts, but that is swiftly changing, too. His Frankenstein creations—conjure, if you will, a stainless steel dinosaur making love to a car—were pyrotechnic tributes to the art of bricolage, but also to vernaculars that are polyfocal, fertilized by India's inestimable cultural richness. Along the way, Shetty reminded us that the ecstatic intermingling he was so taken with was both ancient and modern.

In embracing pastiche, Shetty's work gives lie to the myth of authenticity. To be sure, a thirst for authenticity has spawned a global industry. Whither perfectly local ethnic food, artisanal values, or noble ruins—untouched by the unseemly tourist hordes? Even Starbucks, that paragon of generic corporate chain culture, got the memo, selling pre-fab lunch boxes labeled "real food." Authenticity tests are everywhere. Words like "tradition" assume a mystical charge. When the American poet Kenny Goldsmith cuts and pastes texts from the internet—autopsy reports, recipes, singles ads—and declares the resulting concoction his own, the guardians of authenticity are up in arms. In India, a Muslim artist is hounded out of the country for depicting Hindu deities in the nude; a trespasser, his relationship to Hinduism "inauthentic," it is said that he has no right to access that rich store of imagery.

A series of sculptural objects in the gallery bring these vexing questions to life. Six pots, popularly known as *matkas*, are assembled on a shelf. They seem to have been cracked, then awkwardly reconstituted, their gashes and wounds filled in with teak. The pots look pleasingly old, as if imbued with atmosphere, a whiff of nobility, former lives. What is not evident is that these pots, weathered, ostensibly authentic, are in fact made in China. Impostors, they have flooded the Indian market over the past ten years or more. In other words, they are as much a part of the “local” landscape as anything else. Ersatz: what does that word mean anyway? Tradition: didn’t Eric Hobsbawm remind us that it is invented?¹ Like the ancient South Indian folktale which has been recast, enriched and enlivened with each new embroidery, each new telling, the pots have taken a zigzag journey—shapeshifted, mutated, altered. Suddenly, the distinctly Benjaminian anxiety around the extinction of a certain type of storytelling gives way to plenitude, like a glorious Rauschenberg combine that has absorbed the stuff of time and matter.² Rauschenberg, as it happens, exercised an outsized influence on Shetty in his youth. New tellings, new bodies.

The *matkas*, it should be said, carry an extra resonance, for they are also the kind of pots used for traditional funerary rituals. In those gatherings, a chief mourner, usually the oldest son of the deceased, carries the pot, which is filled with water, over his shoulder while he circles the recumbent body three times. Water streams out of small holes made in the pot, which is said to be a stand-in for the human body. The water, escaping as it does, symbolizes the journey of the soul. At the end of the ceremony, the pot is smashed. The cycle continues. New tellings, new bodies.

Elsewhere in the gallery sits another object of enigmatic charge. A chair of the mid-century modern ilk is cast in bronze. A little snooping reveals that it was a chair that the artist’s father—himself once a practitioner of an ancient theatrical form called yakshagana—sat in for years. The handsome object is textured by time, a conspicuous crease revealing the weight of a recumbent body, year after year. Not far from the chair is a rectangular cage fashioned from wood. The cage, a modernist grid, almost human size, evokes a distinct claustrophobia, a psychic state. Surrounded as it is by objects, could it also evoke our insatiable need to surround ourselves with them? To be captive to their auras, their stories, their worth, their protection? If modern religion is premised on the worship of objects, these are the totems that soothe. Extending this line of thought, Shetty’s exhibition could equally be a parable about contemporary art—its invitation to covet, to keep the faith, to suspend disbelief.

A final image comes in the form of a video. In it, we see the artist, hazy, from the back. He is slowly walking away. His journey conjures the life of the *matka*, as well as the parallel journey of the soul. In walking away, Shetty leaves us, the audience, the cagey grid, the objects assembled—each pregnant with meaning—behind. *This world is a house made of wood, and, lo! it is burning furiously*, said the 15th century Indian mystic and poet Kabir. And

¹ See *The Invention of Tradition*, by Eric Hobsbawm.

² See “The Storyteller,” by Walter Benjamin.

yet regardless, the song and the story live on, even if altered. Even after the fire. Even after the house has burned to the ground. New tellings, new bodies. Make of it what you will.







A Song, A Story, 2016
Installation view - Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai



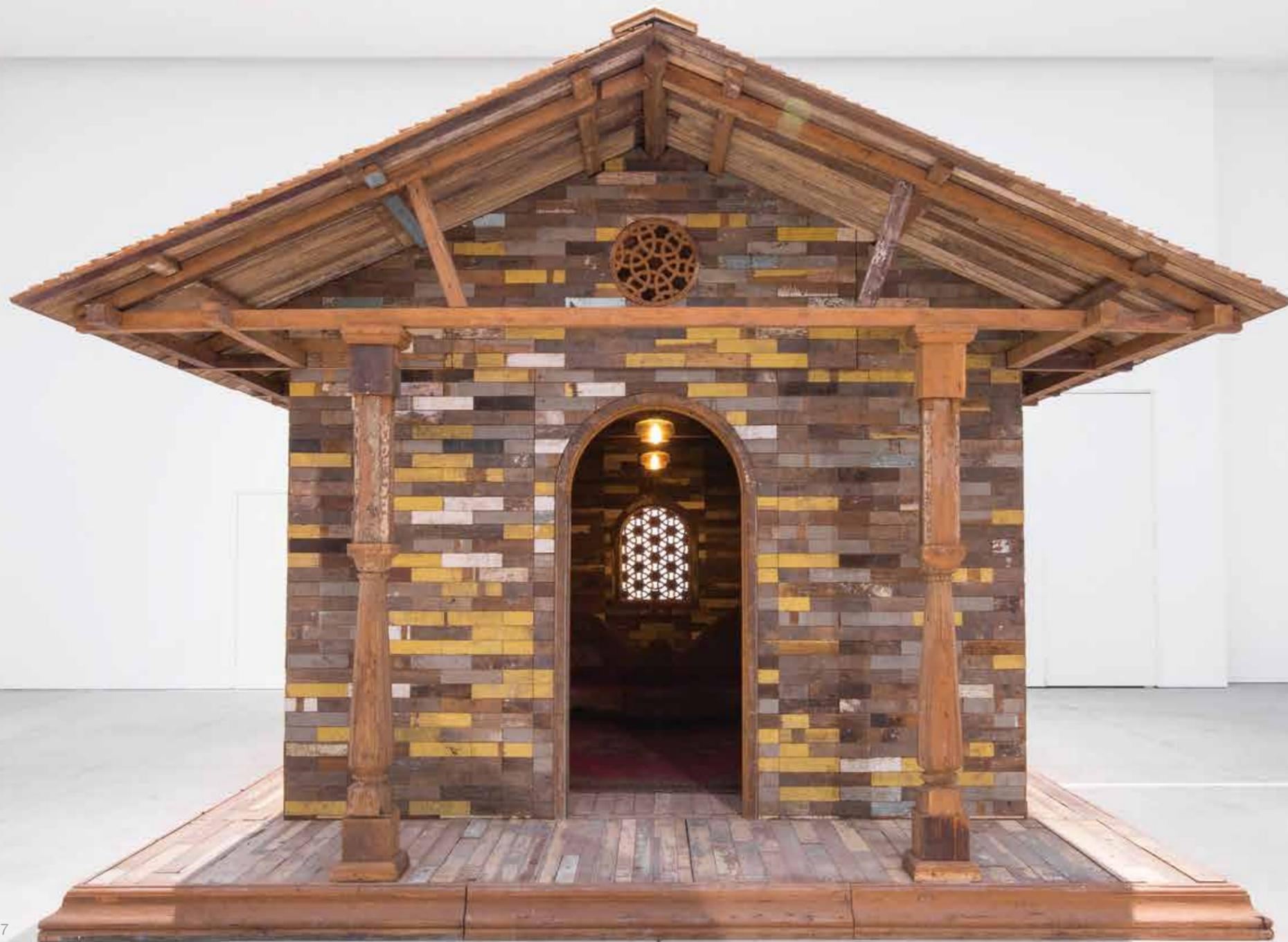
A Song, A Story | Sculpture I - A Public Space, 2016
Recycled teak wood, lamps, water
365.8 x 365.8 x 53.3 cm



A Song, A Story, 2016
Installation view - Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai



A Song, A Story, 2016
Installation view - Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai



A Song, A Story | Sculpture II - A Private Space, 2017
Recycled teak wood, carpet, wooden sofa, tanpura
685.8 x 533.4 x 365.8 cm



A Song, A Story | Sculpture II - A Private Space, 2017
Installation view - Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai



A Song, A Story | Sculpture II - A Private Space, 2017
Installation view - Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai



A Song, A Story | Sculpture II - A Private Space, 2017
Installation view - Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai



A Song, A Story | Sculpture II - A Private Space, 2017
Installation view - Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai



A Song, A Story, 2017
Video still



A Song, A Story, 2017
Video still



A Song, A Story, 2017
Video still

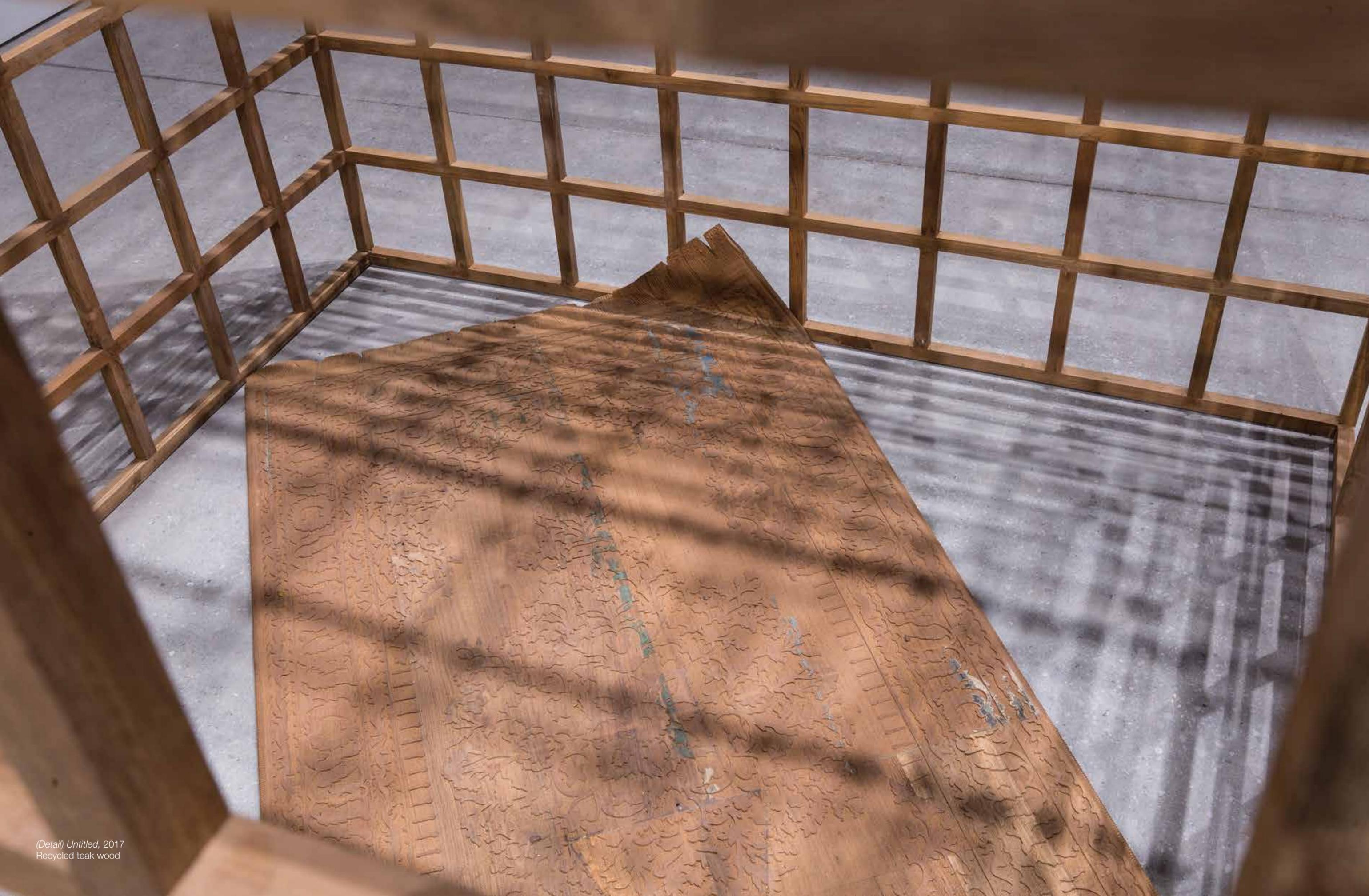


A Song, A Story, 2017
Video still



Untitled, 2017
Recycled teak wood
182.9 x 182.9 x 228.6 cm, 203.2 x 101.6 x 30.5 cm





(Detail) Untitled, 2017
Recycled teak wood

Untitled, 2017
Brass and bronze
61 x 76.2 x 76.2 cm



Untitled, 2017
Recycled teak wood, metal, fabric
88.9 x 88.9 x 88.9 cm





(Detail) *Untitled*, 2017
Recycled teak wood, metal, fabric

Untitled, 2017
Recycled teak wood
238.8 x 182.9 x 25.4 cm





(Detail) *Untitled*, 2017
Recycled teak wood

Untitled, 2017
Recycled teak wood
63 x 34 x 22 cm





Untitled, 2017
Recycled teak wood
63 x 34 x 22 cm





(Detail) Untitled, 2017
Recycled teak wood and found ceramics



Untitled, 2017
Recycled teak wood and found ceramics
30.5 x 38.1 cm each

Untitled, 2017
Recycled teak wood and found ceramics
96.5 x 71.1 cm each





(Detail) *Untitled*, 2017
Recycled teak wood and found ceramics



Untitled, 2017
Recycled teak wood and found ceramics
96.5 x 71.1 cm each

Untitled, 2016
Recycled teak wood and found ceramics
35.6 x 21.6 cm each





(Detail) *Untitled*, 2016
Recycled teak wood and found ceramics



Untitled, 2016
Recycled teak wood and found ceramics
137.2 x 61 x 64.8 cm





SUDARSHAN SHETTY

Born in Mangalore, India, 1961
Lives and works in Mumbai, India

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna
Shoonya Ghar, Dr. Bhau Daji Lad City Museum, Mumbai
Shoonya Ghar, Al Serkal, Dubai
- 2016 Shoonya Ghar, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi
A Song A Story, Rolls-Royce Art Programme, Maker Maxity, Mumbai
Mimic Momento, Galerie Daniel Templon, Brussels
- 2015 who must write these lines, GALLERYYSKE, Bangalore
- 2014 every broken moment, piece by piece, GALLERYYSKE, New Delhi
- 2012 The pieces earth took away, Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna
- 2011 Listen outside this house, GALLERYYSKE, Bangalore
Between the tea cup and a sinking constellation, Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris
- 2010 this too shall pass, Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai
The more I die the lighter I get, Tilton Gallery, New York
- 2009 Galerie Daniel Templon, Paris
Six Drops, GALLERYYSKE, Bangalore
- 2008 Leaving Home, Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna
Saving Skin, Jack Tilton Gallery, New York
- 2006 Love, GALLERYYSKE and Bodhi Art, Mumbai (cat)2005Eight corners of the world, GALLERYYSKE, Bangalore
Shift, a collaborative architectural installation with Shantanu Poredi and Manisha Agarwal, Philips Contemporary, Mumbai (cat)
Party is elsewhere, Jamaat Art Gallery, Mumbai
- 2004 Statics, Chemould Gallery, Mumbai (cat)2003Consanguinity, Nature Morte, Bose Pacia Modern at the Habitat Visual Arts Centre, New Delhi
- 2001 For Here or To Go, Installation at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka (cat)
- 2000 Lone Boat River Song, Spike Island, Bristol
- 1996 Paintings, Max Mueller Bhavan, Mumbai
- 1995 Paper Moon, Pundole Art Gallery and Framji Cowasjee Hall, Mumbai and Ravindra Bhavan, New Delhi. (cat)
- 1991 Holland Art Gallery, Rotterdam, a part of Spirit of India Celebration in The Netherlands, Galerie Drie, Amsterdam (cat)

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2016 Yinchuan Biennale, curated by Bose Krishnamachari, Museum of Contemporary Art, Yinchuan
20th Biennale of Sydney, curated by Stephanie Rosenthal, Sydney
These are a few of our favourite works, GALLERYYSKE and PHOTOINK, New Delhi
- 2015 Constructs Constructions, curated by Roobina Karode, Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi2014The Missing Pavilion, curated by Gayatri Sinha, School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi
- 2013-2014 Art Walk: Water, curated by Gayatri Sinha, Europalia, Liege
Rebirth of Detail, Sunaparanta Goa Center for The Arts, Goa
- 2013 Delhi inaugural show, GALLERYYSKE, New Delhi
- 2012 Kochi Muziris Biennale, curated by Bose Krishnamachari and Riyas Komu, Kochi
Critical Mass, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv
Indian Highway, Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing
- 2011 Homespun, curated by Girish Shahane, Devi Art Foundation, Delhi NCR

The Matters Within: New Contemporary Art of India, curated by Betti-Sue Hertz, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, San Francisco
 Paris-Delhi-Bombay, Centre Pompidou, Paris
 Sympathy for the Devil, curated by Walter Vanhaerents and Pierre-Olivier Rollin, Vanhaerents Art Collection, Brussels
 Prague Biennale, Prague
 Indian Highway, The Musee d'Art Contemporain, Lyon
 India Inclusive, World Economic Forum, Davos
 Against All Odds, curated by Arshiya Lokhandwala, Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi
 2010 Contemplating the Void, curated by Nancy Spector, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
 Indian Highway, Herring Museum of Contemporary Art, Denmark
 Looking Glass - The existence of difference, curated by Gayatri Sinha, Religare, New Delhi
 2009 Vancouver Biennale, Vancouver
 India Contemporary, Gem Museum for Contemporary Art, The Hague
 Spheres 2009, Goodman Gallery, Le Moulin
 For Life: The Language of Communication, Tilton Gallery, New York
 Indian Highway, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo
 2008 Dark Materials, curated by David Thorpe, GSK Contemporary Royal Academy of Art, London
 The Destruction Party, The Royal Monceau Hotel, Paris
 Ten Light-Years, Kashi Art Gallery, Kochi
 Affair, curated by Bose Krishnamachari, 1 x 1 Gallery, Dubai
 2007 Unholy Truths, Initial Access, Frank Cohen Collection, Wolverhampton
 India 20, curated by Anupa Mehta, at Rabindra Bhavan, Lalit Kala Akademi, Delhi
 Pink, Galerie Mirchandani + Steinreucke, Bombay
 2006 with Love, curated by GALLERYYSKE and Tilton Gallery, Miami Design District, Miami
 2005 Bombay Boys, Palette Art Gallery New Delhi (cat)
 Configurations, Anant Art Gallery New Delhi
 Group Show curated by Soumitro Ghosh, GALLERYYSKE, Bangalore
 Endless Terrain, curated by Yashodhara Dalmia, Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi
 2004 Bombay X 17, Kashi Art Gallery, Kochi
 2003 Zoom, Contemporary art from India at Culturgest, curated by Louis Serpa, Lisbon (cat)
 Highlights, Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai (cat)
 2002 Call of the Todd, Seoul Art Centre, Seoul
 Creative Space, Sakshi Gallery, Habitat Centre, New Delhi
 2001 Century City, curated by Gita Kapoor Tate Modern, London. (cat)
 Excerpts from the Bestsellers, Installation, David Sassoon Library, Mumbai
 Installation at the Apparao Gallery, New Delhi
 2000 Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (cat)
 Making Circles, Installation, National Gallery of Modern Art, Mumbai.
 Bollywood - passenger terminal, curated by Els Reijnders, Foundation for Indian Artists, Amsterdam, Gwangju Biennale, South Korea (cat)
 1999 Sotheby's Prize Exhibition, Jehangir Nicholson Gallery, Mumbai (cat)
 Private Mythologies, Contemporary Art from India, curated by Akira Tatehata The Japan Foundation, Tokyo. (cat)
 A Brisk Walk Makes You Feel Good, a collaborative photo installation with Vinay Mahidhar and Sunitha Kumar, Sakshi Art Gallery, Mumbai. (cat)
 Completed commissioned public sculpture in Fukuoka, Japan, a part of Hakata Riverain Art Project, curated by Fumio Nanjo. (cat)
 Flashback Flash Forward, carated by Anupa Mehta, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai
 Legatee - Fine Arts Company, Mumbai. (cat)

Embarkations curated by Yashodhara Dalmia, Sakshi Gallery, Mumbai (cat)
 1998 Represented India at the Art in the World, Passage de Retz, Paris
 Colours of Independence - CIMA, Kolkata and National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi. (cat)
 'Tryst with Destiny': Contemporary Indian Art, Singapore Art Museum, Singapore.
 Inaugural Exhibition Sakshi Gallery Mumbai.
 Presences of the Past, curated by Tasneem Mehta, Jehangir Nicholson Gallery, Mumbai (cat)
 Joint exhibition with Leslie Dill, Nature Morte, New Delhi
 1997 Shilpayan: 100 years of sculpture in India, curated by Latika Katt, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi (cat)
 1996 165 Inches in Time an installation at the Marischal College, Aberdeen, Scotland.
 Private Languages - Pundole Art Gallery, Mumbai, curated by Ranjit Hoskote (cat)
 1995 Sculpture 95, curated by Madan Lal Gallerie Espace and Rabindra Bhavan, New Delhi. (cat)
 1994 Installation with Morzottos Fashion show at Bhuli Bhatiyari, New Delhi
 1991 Commissioned installation project, based on Indian Circus at Hotel Imperial, New Delhi.
 1990 Kanoria Centre for the Arts Exhibition, Mumbai.
 1988 Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, Ahmedabad
 1987 Kala Yatra, Bangalore1
 1984 Lalit Kala Akademi Exhibition, New Delhi
 1983 Monsoon Art Show, Jehangir Art gallery, Mumbai1982Bombay Art Society Exhibition, Mumbai

FELLOWSHIPS, RESIDENCIES AND AWARDS

2017 Artist of the year, India Today Art Awards
 2016 Curator, Kochi-Muziris Biennale
 2007 New Installations by Artists from India, The Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh
 2006 Ford Foundation Fellow at the New School for General Studies, New York
 2004 Khoj International Workshop, Mumbai
 1999 Charles Wallace India Award to work at the Art Space, Bristol
 1997 Sanskriti Award, New Delhi
 Khoj, New Delhi
 1996 Scottish Sculpture Workshop, under Mobil Visual Arts project
 1993 Sanskriti Kendra, New Delhi
 1987 Fellow at Kanoria Centre for Arts, Ahmedabad
 Visiting Faculty at National Institute of Design Ahmedabad

EDUCATION

1985 BFA in Painting, Sir. JJ School of Art, Mumbai



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Leila Heller Gallery would like to thank Sudarshan Shetty, Sunitha Kumar Emmart, Amrit Kaur and Jameel Khan for making this exhibition possible.

978-0-9861165-7-5
Published on the occasion of the exhibition

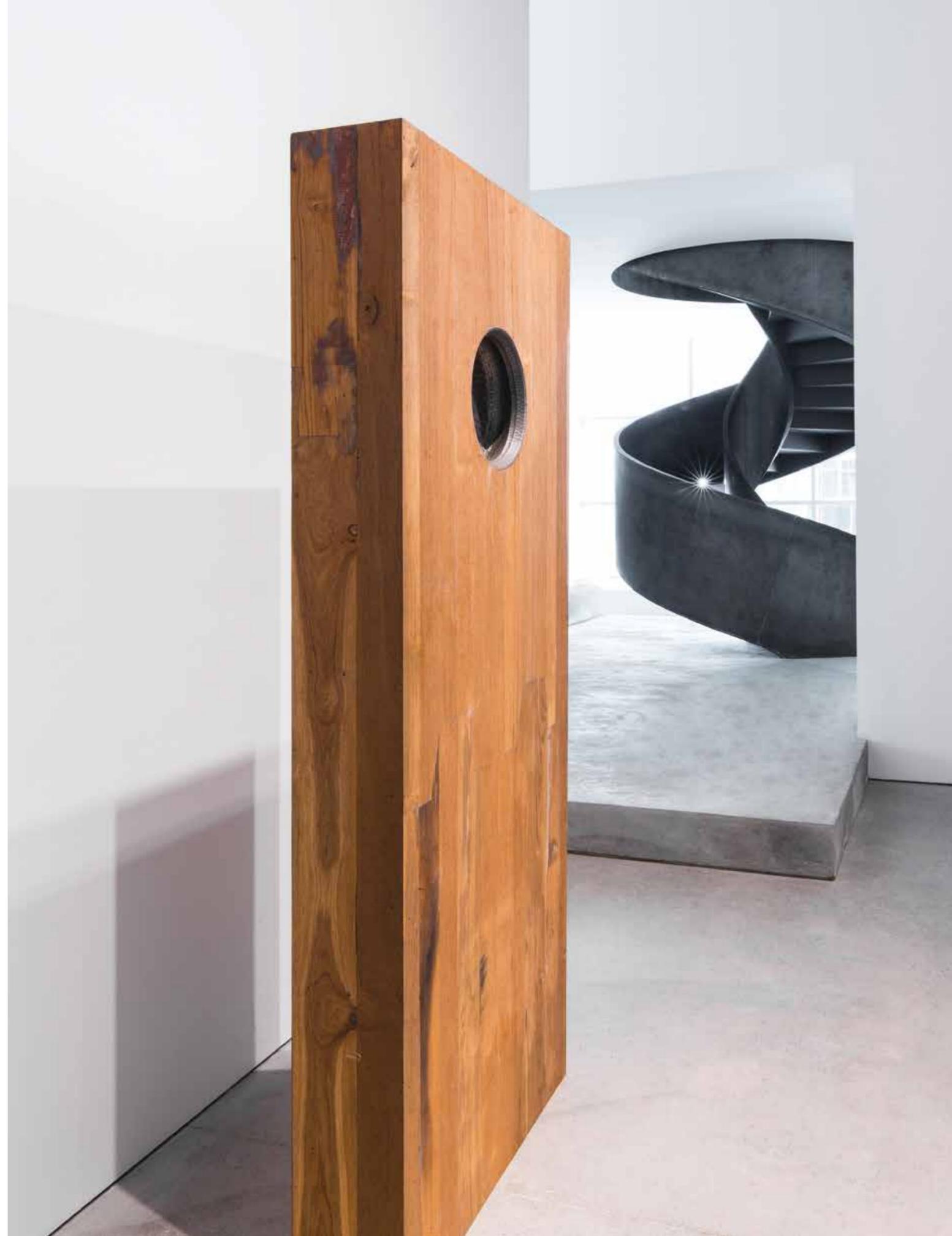
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January 21 - March 12, 2018

Images courtesy of the artist
Photography by Altamash Urooj
and Nadine Nour el Din

Catalogue design by Nadine Nour el Din

LEILA HELLER PUBLISHING .
87 Alserkal Avenue, PO Box 413991
Al Quoz 1, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
www.leilahellergallery.com

Publication © 2018 LEILA HELLER GALLERY, Dubai





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