

After the Butcher – Showroom for contemporary art and social issues
Spittastr. 25 – 10317 Berlin
+49-178 3298 106 - mailto@after-the-butcher.de

A call to a relationship

Elisa T. Bertuzzo and Sambaran Das

curated by Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann

Exhibition: May 20 – June 18

Opening: May 19, 2023 from 7pm

open by appointment: mailto@after-the-butcher.de or +49 178 3298 106

„...Accha, how much time did you need to find me the other day? No time, right? Good that I told you to pick me up on the over-bridge: on the crossing you wouldn't have found me, among so many people. I know how to find my way in Dhaka! And not only in Mirpur I, but also in Jatrabari, Saidabad, Karwan Bazaar, Farm Gate...“

The exhibition *A call to a relationship* takes off from Elisa T. Bertuzzo's book *archipelagos*, a compilation of conversations with seasonal workers, street vendors and commuters which took place between 2012 and 2015 in Bangladesh and West Bengal, India. These conversations are not “material” from the fieldwork of an “anthropologist”, but testimonies of a long travel companionship in which seemingly unrelated protagonists become friends and authors. Mirroring situated forms of self-organisation and solidarity, they question the narrative of a destructive and alienating complete urbanisation.

Both the book and the exhibition are intended as a homage and transformation of a popular literary genre. In nine *jatras*, folk plays performed on travelling stages (mainly) in Bangladesh and West Bengal, Durga, Aijer, Dulal, Badal, Enamul, Milton, Kartik, Soyjuddin and Sahabuddin, narrate their everyday lives. In addition to the actors, *jatras* typically feature the characters of Sutradhar and Bibek. The first connects places and events and spins the story; the second comments, provokes, ponders what might be learned from it. Emerging through conversations which trouble and blur ideas of curatorship and authorship, and enriching new forms of collaboration and relationship, this exhibition approaches the book like a sort of Bibek. What connects viewers in Berlin with these stories? Is an empathy that is not corrupted by past and present colonialism possible? How to address this history of power, which repeats in the violence of supply chains and border regimes, and whose strategy is to transform differences of race, religion, gender, into trenches?

Artist and activist Sambaran Das, known in Kolkata for his graphic novels, protest posters and interventions in public spaces, created for the plays nine tableaux in the style of the jatra booklets printed in West Bengal. The exhibition presents his sketches and drawings, excerpts from the plays, a variety of props, and mental 'journey records' of the time of commuting, working, surviving. Re-staging Sutradhar and Bibek, it articulates the rage against that history to make it resonate.

'I will have in an undergraduate class, let's say, a young, white male student, politically-correct, who will say: "I am only a bourgeois white male, I can't speak." ... I say to them: "Why not develop a certain degree of rage against the history that has written such an abject script for you that you are silenced?" ... When you take the position of not doing your homework—"I will not criticize because of my accident of birth, the historical accident"—that is a ... pernicious position ... I say that, you have to take a certain risk.'
G.C. Spivak, *The post-colonial critic*, 1999

Sketches and drawings: Sambaran Das

mental 'journey records': Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann

Diagrams: Boris Murnig

Puppet theatre: Elisa T. Bertuzzo, Alice Creischer and Andreas Siekmann

Short bios:

Sambaran Das, born in 1980 in Kolkata/India, is a multidisciplinary artist taking deep interest in the popular urban vernacular culture of the city. Working in and from Kolkata, he initiates public art projects, performs and occasionally writes on art. His post-truth, dystopian comic book *Obotar*, loosely based on the Covid crisis, has been published in 2023 Kolkata bookfair.

Elisa T. Bertuzzo, born in Vicenza/Italy in 1980, is an ethnographer and urban studies scholar based in Berlin. Her research interests are the underrepresented everyday life facets of solidarity, resistance, and self-organisation (especially) in South Asia and Europe. Her book, *archipelagos. from urbanisation to translocalisation*, was published by Kadmos Verlag in 2019.