

KINDNESS उदारता

ऑस्ट्रेलिया भारत सांस्कृतिक विनिमय
AUSTRALIA-INDIA CULTURAL EXCHANGE

... वास्तविक दया अनिवार्य रूप से अप्रत्याशित परिणाम के साथ एक विनिमय है ...'

— एडम फिलिप्स और बारबरा टेलर: दया के बारे में

... real kindness is an exchange with essentially unpredictable consequences ...

— Adam Phillips and Barbara Taylor: *On Kindness*



Australian Government



उदारता

**KINDNESS / UDARTA
AUSTRALIA-INDIA CULTURAL EXCHANGE**

Celebrating twenty years of creative cultural exchanges
between Australia and India funded by the
Australia-India Council 1992-2012.

KINDNESS उदारता

ऑस्ट्रेलिया भारत सांस्कृतिक विनिमय
AUSTRALIA-INDIA CULTURAL EXCHANGE

2012

KINDNESS / UDARTA AUSTRALIA–INDIA CULTURAL EXCHANGE 20 YEAR ANNIVERSARY PROJECT

FOREWORD

How better to understand other cultures than through their art? Artists have long been inspired and enriched by other cultures. They have gained insights into themselves and their own source of creativity by studying other lands, other cultures, other traditions. It's not only artists who prosper through this exchange. We can all gain understanding of what we share and where we differ in values and aspirations from the arts of other cultures. The strong human need for self-expression connects us all. Creative connections promote a deeper, more sophisticated understanding and heightened respect for the cultures and values of others. The Arts in many forms – literature, visual art and music to name a few – have a way of demolishing barriers between cultures and peoples that formal diplomacy can rarely match.

Australia's cross-cultural exchange with India has a long and strong history. We celebrate that relationship in this book which accompanies the cultural project *On Kindness / Udarta. Australia – India Cultural Exchanges 1992–2012*. The publication, along with an exhibition and a public program of collaborative music performance and literary dialogue, will celebrate 20 years of cultural initiatives by the Australia–India Council. The Council's work has always emphasised cross-cultural dialogues and collaborations between Australian and Indian artists. This publication epitomises the goals and spirit of the Council.

Since 1992, the Australia–India Council has been working to broaden the relationship between Australia and India by encouraging and supporting contacts and increasing levels of knowledge and understanding between the peoples and institutions of the two countries. The friendships established, and the insights that have flowed from 20 years of cultural exchanges, form a valued component of the deepening relationship between our two nations. We have growing trade and investment links. We share an obsession with cricket but there is more. This project, and the book that will be its lasting record, offer a window into two decades of ongoing artistic and cultural connections.

I congratulate the artists and organisations from both countries who have contributed to all aspects of this cultural exchange since 1992. I commend their respective visions, and their shared endeavours. I commend also those involved with this history-marking project, conceptualisers Suzanne Davies, Dr Alka Pande with Helen Rayment.

The celebration of this milestone is another example of the continuing strength of the Australia–India relationship.

John McCarthy AO

Chair, Australia–India Council

KINDNESS / UDARTA AUSTRALIA–INDIA CULTURAL EXCHANGE

PREFACE

This publication, *Kindness / Udarta*. Australia-India Cultural Exchange, is the cornerstone of a project in both India and Australia to celebrate twenty years of cultural exchanges between visual artists, writers and musicians. The other elements of the celebration include an exhibition of art works from the publication, music performance by Sandy Evans and Adrian Sherriff from The Australian Art Orchestra (AAO) with Guru Kaaraikkudi Mani's Sruthi Laya Ensemble, and literary discussion between celebrated authors Kiran Nagakar and Christopher Kremmer at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.

The live performances at the Habitat Centre will be broadcast by Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) Radio National and Radio Australia. The entire project will live on electronically through the web links of the RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University) Gallery and Australia-India Council (AIC) and (ABC) websites. We thank Tony MacGregor, Arts Editor, Radio National, for his enthusiastic engagement with this project.

The contributing artists represent a significant sample of creative people who have experienced each other's culture, visited each other's country, worked together, and built relationships based on friendship and mutual respect. The AIC has enabled most of these creative relationships, either by direct funding or by financial support for organizations themselves engaged in promoting cross-cultural understanding through the arts, such as Asialink, Asia Pacific Triennial and Nataraj Cultural Centre, Melbourne.

It is important to record that the AIC is an initiative of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Federal Government of Australia. Its work is an expression of the collective wishes of the Australian people for closer relations with India and her people. A sincere sense of goodwill has for twenty years been the bedrock of the AIC program. It continues to underpin that which we now celebrate.

As is so often the case, this project is the result of meeting many needs and desires. There were pragmatic needs – to develop a 'map' and means of contacting cultural 'alumni'; to celebrate twenty years of AIC initiatives with a tangible record and, not least, to demonstrate the resonance and strength of relationships built on the cross-cultural dialogues which the arts can so readily engender. It is this last stated ambition that best captures the diverse nature of the material printed in *Kindness/Udarta*. Here, we can quietly reflect on the nuanced levels of insight and engagement with the overarching thematic within the complexities of intercultural exchange. Initially, in the spirit of simple curiosity, we wanted to test responses to notions of "kindness", a quality we considered essential in any humane exchange.

The Visual Arts Gallery at the Habitat Centre, New Delhi, is a central cultural location that could accommodate the range of activities envisaged. It is in the spirit of goodwill that the Visual Arts Gallery agreed to be hosting partner. It is fortunate that the two principals responsible for conceptualizing and delivering the enterprise have enjoyed a positive working relationship. This has led to a highly flexible curatorial process, more good spirited wrangling than curating, with much ongoing debate.

Importantly, it was agreed from the outset that a response to the notion of kindness would underpin the project, recognizing that such a notion, while ostensibly simple and compelling, would generate vastly different responses given its variable connotations in different contexts. We started with the western, European account of its defining attributes, drawn from the writing of English psychoanalyst Adam Phillips, and Barbara Taylor,

On Kindness (2009). We were most interested in their characterization that “real kindness is an exchange with essentially unpredictable consequences”. We thank Madhu Sarin for her advice regarding the significant differences from this rendering in an Indian socio-cultural framework, and for directing us to the writing of Sudhir Kakar. But this was our learning and it triggered an ongoing struggle with words, their meanings and the actions they engender.

So kindness became less a theme and more a non-prescriptive reflection on a state of mind and action, captured somehow, somewhere, in the nuances of meanings of the words *daya, karuna, neki, namrata, sanbhavana, udarta*. As we struggled to find a word that was neither patronizing nor embedded in compassion, the process sharpened our awareness of the necessity of intercultural sensitivity. While seeking the most culturally appropriate and Indian specific term, it was agreed from the outset that ‘kindness’ as a quality was unequivocally essential for social cohesion in both intra and intercultural relations in an increasingly complex global environment.

The pragmatic method we adopted was to identify and contact as many artists as possible. This involved extensive cross-referencing and considerable sleuthing and we thank Helen Rayment for her invaluable contribution in this and every aspect of the project. The natural attrition in this process assisted in identifying engagement with the topic. We thank most warmly all the artists, writers and musicians who so graciously responded to our invitation. We are deeply grateful that so many distinguished and celebrated figures, in both countries, have honoured this enterprise with their contributions.

The range of work is extraordinary, reflecting the openness and diversity of the forces behind the initial cultural exchanges. Some works have been created especially, while other images, texts and most particularly music performances pre-existed and were submitted because they were considered pertinent. The task was then to combine images and texts. Here the words of Phillips seem so apt, as the various components make for relationships with unexpected outcomes, sometimes informing the other in terms of possible meanings with exquisite sensitivity; sometimes resonating at a remarkable, if serendipitous, graphic level. The sum of the entire project is a beautifully presented statement of creative goodwill.

The concept of locating all creative participants from the beginning of the AIC was the suggestion of Asha Lele Das, AIC Country Manager at the Australian High Commission for that period. Jasleen Dhamija has proven an invaluable source of advice at key times in the delivery of the project. Minhazz Majumder has enabled us to make contact with several artists and we thank her and Professor Dhamija most warmly. Distinguished colleague Mohindar Dhillon has been a champion of bringing superb Indian musicians to Australia and he generously made his archive of recordings available to us for inclusion on the two CDs that form a significant part of the musical record in this project. Likewise we acknowledge the contribution of Margaret Lloyd whose efforts have enabled access to key musicians in Australia and India. We thank Vice Chancellor Margaret Gardner and Deputy Vice-Chancellor Daine Alcorn RMIT University, for the driving vision of a globally focused university and the support to enable initiatives such as this to be realized. Finally we thank the AIC for placing their trust in us to bring this project to life.

Suzanne Davies

Director and Chief Curator, RMIT Gallery

Dr Alka Pande

Curator, Visual Arts Gallery, India Habitat Centre

ARTISTS AND
WRITERS

—
MINAM APANG
ROBYN BACKEN
LADO BAI
INEZ BARANAY
MAGGIE BAXTER
ROBYN BEECHE
LUKE BEESLEY
SASKIA BEUDEL
SOURISH BHATTACHARYA
SANDRA BOWKETT
BARBARA BROOKS
LYNDELL BROWN
AND CHARLES GREEN
LOUISA BUFARDECI
JANET BURCHILL
AND JENNIFER McCAMLEY
TERRY BURROWS
ROSE BYGRAVE
PETER CALLAS
ISOBELLE CARMODY
LEE CATALDI
JON CATTAPAN
JAYASHREE CHAKRAVARTY
KANCHAN CHANDER
GEORGIA CHAPMAN
AMIT CHAUDHURI
MANTU CHITRAKAR
MAREE CLARKE
GEOFFREY CONAGHAN
MONIKA CORREA
VICKI COUZENS
KEKI DARUWALLA
DAVID DAVIDAR
PARUL DAVE-MUKHERJI
MEAGHAN DELAHUNT
JASLEEN DHAMIJA
MOIRA DOROPOULOS
RICHARD DUNN
MICHELE ELLIOT
SONIA FALEIRO
JAYNE FENTON KEANE
EMILY FLOYD
ROGER FOLEY-FOGG
ROBYN FRIEND
ANN FERGUSON
SHILPA GUPTA
SUBODH GUPTA
HELEN GEIER
JOAN GROUNDS
LIBBY HATHORN
BARRY HILL
JYOTINDRA JAIN
OP JAIN
DAVID JENSZ

RAJ KAMAL JHA
SANGITA JINDAL
TUSHAR JOAG
RANBIR SINGH KALEKA
REENA SAINI KALLAT
YURI KAWANABE
THOMAS KENEALLY
CHRISTOPHER KÖLLER
BHARTI KHER
SEEMA KOHLI
DEREK KRECKLER
CHRISTOPHER KREMMER
PRADYUMNA KUMAR
PUSHPA KUMAR
KAY LAWRENCE
BEM LE HUNTE
ALISON LESTER
SARA LINDSAY
MINHAZZ MAJUMDAR
NALINI MILANI
DJAMBAWA MARAWILI
VICKI MCCONVILLE
SUDESH MISHRA
CALLUM MORTON
KIRSTY MURRAY
LES MURRAY
PUSHPAMALA N
KIRAN NAGARKAR
PETER NAGY
SURENDRAN NAIR
SATENDRA NANDAN
LINDA NEIL
SIMEON NELSON
IAN NORTH
RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE:
MONICA NARULA AND
SHUDDHABRATA SENGUPTA
GEOFF PAGE
RM PALANIAPPAN
MICHAEL PANCKRIDGE
DR ALKA PANDE
MRINAL PANDE
LOUISE PARAMOR
CATHERINE PARKER
AND KAMAL SWAMI
GIRIRAJ PRASAD
MANDY RIDLEY
LOUISE RIPPERT
AVINO RITSE
REKHA RODWITTIYA
SHARMILA SAMANT
SANGEETA SANDRASEGAR

HAKU SHAH
MUKESH SHARMA
GULAM MOHAMMED SHEIKH
VICKY SHUKUROGLOU
JANGARH SINGH SHYAM
DHIRAJ SINGH
SODA_JERK
VIPOO SRIVILASA
JOSEPHINE STARRS
JITEN THUKRAL
AND SUMIR TAGRA
SAFINA UBEROI
K VENUGOPAL
LIYAWADAY WIRRAPANDA
JENNY WATSON
JUDY WATSON
KARL WIEBKE
ALEXIS WRIGHT
JUDITH WRIGHT
LOUISEANN ZAHRA-KING
JOHN ZUBRZYCKI

MUSICIANS

—
AUSTRALIAN ART ORCHESTRA
AND SRUTHI LAYA
SHRI BV BALASAI
SANDY EVANS
LACHLAN DAVIDSON
GURU KAARAIKKUDI MANI
MANJIRI KELKAR
UP RAJU
NATESAN RAMANI
PHILIP REX
NIKO SCHÄUBLE
SHIVKUMAR SHARMA
ADRIAN SHERRIFF
U SHRINIVAS
ALISTER SPENCE
L SUBRAMANIAM
THE SUBTERRANEANS
JAMES RYAN
JAMES MULLER
STEVE HUNTER
JAMES HAUPTMANN
VAIDYANATHAN SURESH
SCOTT TINKLER

KINDNESS

उदारता



To be included in a community of about a million by reason of profession/caste has been an unfolding awareness. I see now it has been the foundation of the relationships I have with many of the potters I have come to know over the last ten years, people I have come to respect and love.

On my first trip to India as a traveller I was told not to say potter on being asked. "What is your profession?" On subsequent trips and over time working with traditional potters, I have come to understand the role of caste in their community. On a more recent trip to the Pushkar for Kartik Purni wandering the frenetic streets I was told on passing a particular water seller "Sandra you can buy water here" it was for potters, and behind the water seller "a place where you can stay", the dharamsala for potters. This was the final stage of realization of my status as a potter and the nature of being unconditionally included in the community of Indian traditional potters.

Despite all this, why was it that on my initial arrival at the potter's colony of Kumhaargram in 2002 I experienced a sense of coming home. Had my unconscious self known I was included but it took many more years for my intellect to make the connection.

I now proudly say

मैं कुम्हार हूँ

I am a potter.

33 people (19 women)
4 cows
5 ants
5 parakeets

morning movements
from Tishi window

16.11.07

Sandra Bowkett
Tallaroo Australia
28.9.2011

SONIA FALEIRO

I was invited to the Sydney Writers' Festival in May 2011 to speak about my new book of non-fiction, *Beautiful Thing*, which is about a young bar dancer called Leela. The book took five years to write and I spent a lot of the time convincing the people who inhabited the fascinating if shadowy world of Bombay's dance bars, to talk to me. I spoke with bar dancers and gangsters and bar owners and pimps.

But it was the *hijras*, the transgenders, who were hardest to convince. I'd call one of them on the phone, they wouldn't answer. They'd agree to meet with me, then wouldn't bother turning up. They'd ask very personal questions, but also questions I didn't know how to respond to, such as why I didn't wear padded undergarments or why I couldn't just stay home and live the 'normal life' I was 'blessed' with.

After months of pursuit I finally made a breakthrough.

I was invited to the home of a hijra friend of Leela's. Her name was Masti, and she was magnificently tall and foul mouthed. In the course of the afternoon I saw Masti down numerous whiskies, dance wildly around her flat, and strike a fellow hijra violently on her face for stepping out of line. I fell asleep on the couch. I woke up with a start sometime around dawn, and found that someone had covered me with a spotless white chunni. I looked around and saw Masti on a chair, looking intently at me.

'Did you sleep well?' She asked.

'Yes, thank you.'

She smiled with satisfaction. 'I covered you with my chunni. So everyone would know that if they touched you, they'd have to deal with me.'

Masti invited Leela and me to the spiritual site of Haji Malang in Kalyan, outside Bombay. She said we'd have to climb a small hill to get there. 'How small?' I wondered. I was asthmatic.

Just as I'd feared, the hill was tall and steep. Steps were carved out of the stone and they were a foot high. Many pilgrims needed assistance, and some took to crawling like crabs. About fifteen minutes into the climb, I felt a familiar breathlessness. Another fifteen minutes later, I was wheezing.

The hijras, in the meantime were bounding effortlessly along, singing and shouting.

I felt like I was being suffocated.

By this time the hijras were near the top of the hill, and evening had turned into night. The path ahead was illuminated by stars, and torches of fire.

Masti, who was near the top, started looking around. She spied me and gestured with her hands, 'what happened?' I shrugged. I couldn't even speak.

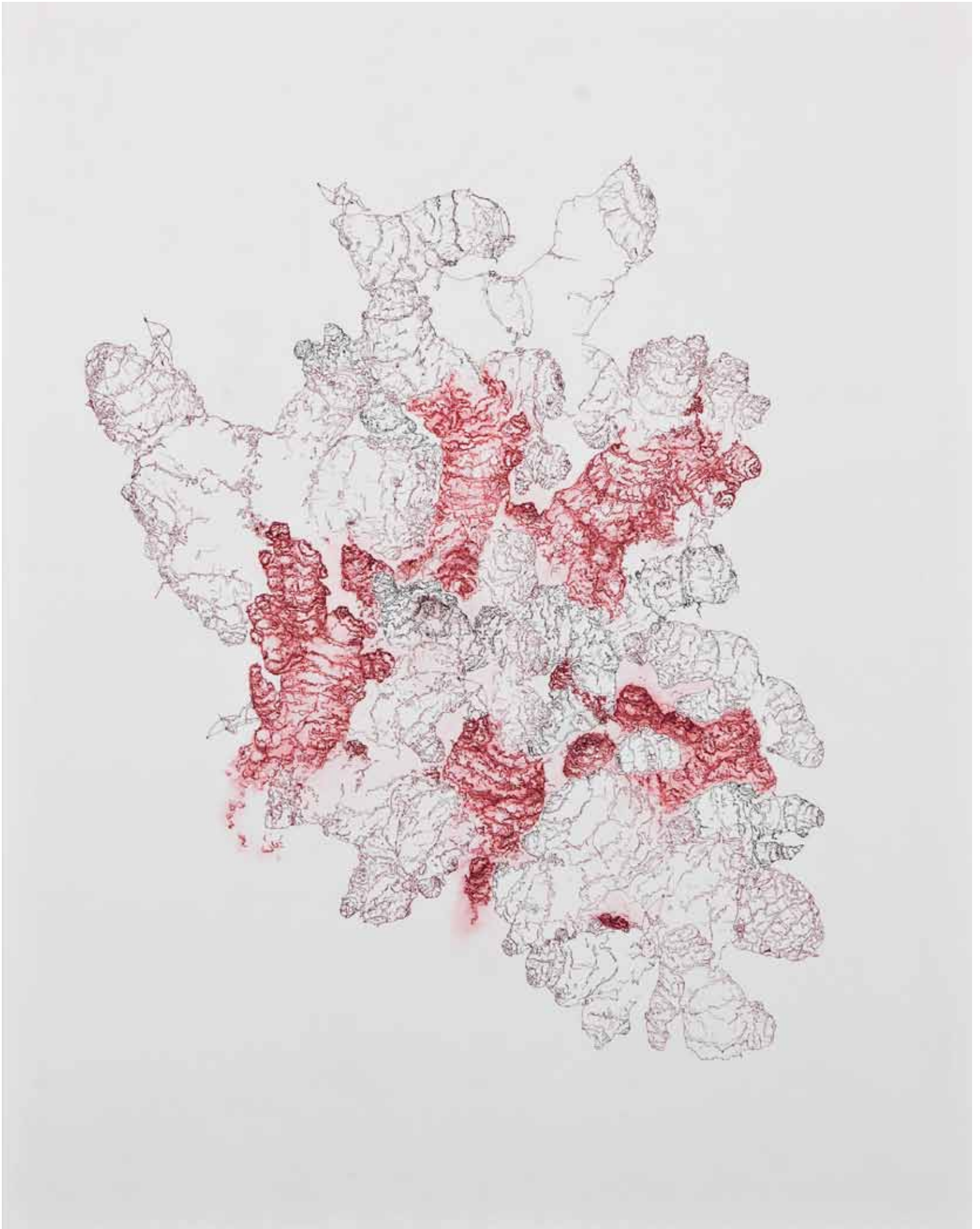
Masti grabbed several other hijras and they bounded down as quickly as they'd made it up. When they reached me, Masti looked into my face, 'You will make it,' she said.

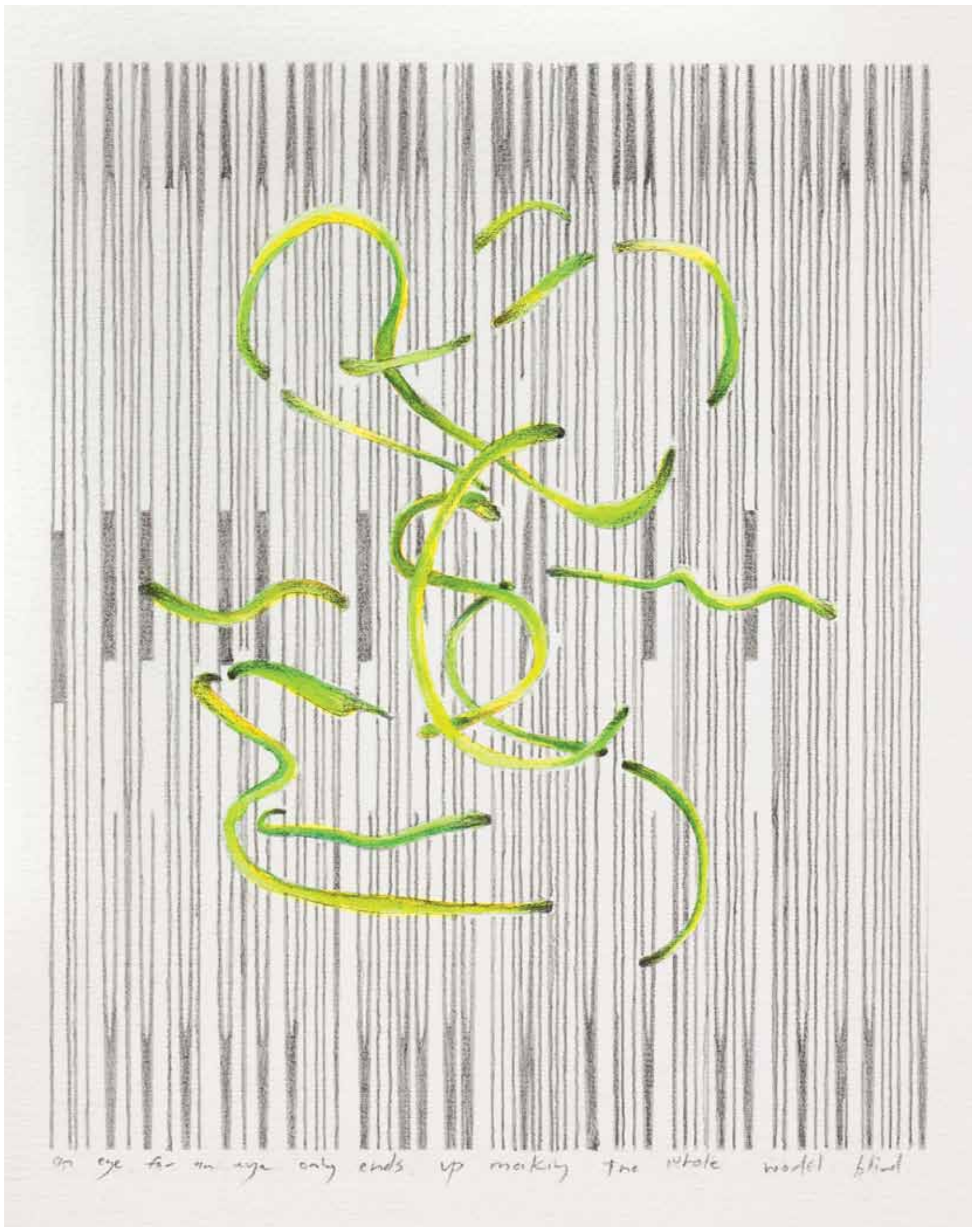
I knew I couldn't, and I said so.

Masti linked arms with me. Another hijra stood behind me, literally holding me up. Every time I needed to stop, they stopped patiently with me. Every time I was ready to give up Masti said, 'but we're almost there!'

And that's how I climbed the hill to Haji Malang. One nudge, one clutch, one kind word of support at a time.

— from *Beautiful Things*





People ask me
why I keep
coming to India.
I say, for the
conversation.

