



KHŌJ 1997

International Artists Workshop

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Last but not least, thanks to all the skilled people of *Modinagar*, whose various abilities entered the space of the workshop and made it a unique event.

Working Group, KHOJ '97: Ajay Desai, Anita Dube, Bharti Kher, PS Ladi, Pooja Sood, Manisha Parekh, Subodh Gupta.

Simon Gallery, The Spy





Khoj : The Search Within

It started of unexpectedly as one by one some of us were asked if we would participate in International workshops in Zambia, in the UK, in Namibia, in South Africa, in New York etc.

And before we realised it, we were hooked not only on the concept but also to the responsibility of setting up the first one in India using our (happy) experiences and imagining a happier one here on home ground which we could tint with our knowledge of a particular context and forge into something significant with our commitment and sheer hardwork.

This was Khoj '97, our difficult coming together, test of our varying capacities; ideologically synchronous as well as diachronous, but focused towards an autonomous open ended umbrella organization led by artists for artists. Our aim was basically to function as an experimental art-laboratory that would bring artists together from different parts of the country, from the sub continent and from around the globe, setting up a co-operative non-hierarchical work situation where dialogue, exchange and transfer of information, energy and skills could take place as an intensely lived experience. Khoj is an emblem of our vision of working together in difficult situations, somehow pushing against the establishment grain under the rubric of creating sensitizing encounters, opening up insularities and closures to address the binary polarizations that have hardened into unchangeable positions both inside and outside.



Khoj then is a search that seeks to question through an Art Workshop these divides: The **urban** vs. the **provincial**: the **post modern** vs. the **modern**: the **local** vs. the **global**: the **male** vs. the **female**: the **left** vs. the **right**: the **visible** vs. the **invisible** - on the basis of class and privilege in our cultural spaces, as also the absence of a dialogue with our subcontinental neighbors - Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Khoj also seeks a non-Euro-American tilt within cultural discourse, more connected with contemporary art practices/practitioners in Africa, the Asia Pacific, Latin America, China, Australia etc. to assist each other's processes of cultural empowerment and assertions of specific locations as vital and meaningful. Khoj is a process: dynamic, changing, evolving both structurally and conceptually, that sees itself as an alternative. One among many, a group initiative that functions outside state or institutional control, outside bureaucratic apathy and the cynical market driven art scene. Khoj believes that it is critically different.

The cooperative structure of Khoj has been conceptually modelled on successful workshops in Africa and the UK. The first of these - the Triangle Workshop in Munroe, New York State was started in 1982 by the sculptor Anthony Caro and the collector Robert Loder. Subsequently in 1985 Thupelo, another workshop started in Johannesburg, through the initiative of South African Artists. This played a significant role in bringing together artists from different regions and



Stephen Hughes
Bedrock (detail)



backgrounds during the apartheid years. Thereafter workshops mushroomed in Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, Zambia, Senegal, Jamaica and in the UK. Like Khoj, flagged off in India in November 1997, new workshops are being inaugurated elsewhere in Cuba, Australia, Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria. All these have been guided by the Triangle Arts Trust based in London, whose mission it is to expand the workshop network. Khoj in India now is linked to this active international workshop chain which is a kind of movement with a vast primary network in Africa. Its direction is towards an empowerment of third world artists and their multicultural bonding outside a white bias, for an exchange and flow of information along other lines. A spirit of fostering respect for cultural, linguistic, geo-political, sexual and racial difference is the philosophical core of these workshops, as is the opening up of platforms and spaces to the hitherto unseen and unheard. Khoj celebrates the ingrained liberation impulse within this workshop structure and seeks to make it more and more historically sensitive, context and need specific; hands-on, barrier-less and open-ended.



With lights illuminating the Delhi skyline and crackers creating a din, Khoj started to happen on Diwali night at the party to celebrate the arrival of early overseas artists and friends from different parts of India. The fact that we had done it, that Khoj would happen despite all odds, suddenly got to all of us from the working group, there. One by one came, Yoba Jonathan from Namibia; David Kolaone from South Africa; Ludenyi Omega from Kenya; Simon Callery, Stephen Hughes and Anna Kindersley from London. Wendy Teakel landed from Australia; Mohammad Cader from Sri Lanka, and a little later Rini Tandon from Austria, Luis Gómez from Cuba and Iftikhar Dadi from Pakistan. Ten of them in total - our overseas artists with their different otherness myths, that two weeks of an intensive workshop was to somewhat wear out. And twelve of us from India were there to speak in our multiple tongues of a plurality that could not be easily packaged into pan-Indian terms. Ajay Desai, Subodh Gupta, Manisha Parekh, Prithpal Singh Ladi and Anita Dube were from Delhi and from the working group. There was also Jyotee Kolte and Sudershan Shetty from Mumbai. Gargi Raina and Surendran Nair from Baroda, Radhika Vaidyanathan from Chennai, Walter D'Souza from Ahmedabad and C.K. Rajan from Hyderabad.

Morning meeting of the working group in Sikribagh



Participating artists from left to right :
 Standing: Simon Gallery, Ludyeni Omega,
 C.K. Rajan, Walter D'Souza, Muhanned Cader,
 Wendy Teakel, Yoba Jonathan, P.S. Ladi,
 Luis Gómez, Gargi Raina, Ifrikhar Dadi,
 Jyotee Kolte, Stephen Hughes, Subodh Gupta.
 Seated: Sudershan Shetty, Surendran Nair,
 David Koloane, Anita Dube, Rini Tandon,
 Manisha Parekh, Ajay Desai, Radhika Vaidyanathan.



Modinagar was where we were heading, 55 kms from Delhi, a town that had grown around a group of industries founded by the late Gujarmal Modi in the Nehruvian days of independent India. There was Sikribagh, the venue for Khoj, an old bungalow built in a quasi-colonial feudal style. Amidst acres of land, mango trees and a pond - an idyll in the midst of the now decaying industrial city, a refuge in some ways for concentrated work but nevertheless close to the feverish reality of a small town and its changing fortunes. Generously offered to Khoj for the workshop by SK Modi, Sikribagh was to create encounters of many kinds.

The first for the group was a chance meeting with Aas Mohammad, an entrepreneur with a small foundry and forging workshop along with ancillary assembling units. A skilled and practical craftsman Aas and his brother Yasin were to become the technical mainstays of the workshop assisting almost every artist to realize what they had impetuously imagined.



Ludenyi Omega working with a skilled local craftsman



Rini Tandon at the site working with gardeners



Luis Gómez working at the
site for Sol Digerido



Luis Gómez, Sol Digerido

Another significant encounter at Khoj was the presence of vast spaces, trees, water etc: the whole of Sikribagh as site, its quasi rural setting that opened up unexpected possibilities for work. And some very new and exciting work resulted from this.

Luis Gómez's solar eclipse, made from an iron sheet covering a light source which he sunk into a pit dug in the center of a green field was a very crystallized work.

Then **Wendy Teakel** surprised us all one morning by painting a deep blood red mountain along two surfaces of a wall in the back section of the house. In front of this mountain she folded an unused maroon velvety carpet into a massive ghostly sitting figure, like the wrapped statuary of the public monuments of kings or queens. Offsetting the red against the white lime coated wall and the cobalt blue of the nearby door she created a work of startling presence.



Wendy Teakel
The Red Mountain



Wendy Teakel
Land & Sky

Yoba Jonathan made a poetic bridge for ants using very simple means: a long wire with jute strings hanging from it. This he stretched from two trees across the water of the pond. A spontaneous and brotherly response to what **Anita Dube** was doing nearby - hanging thinly braided electric-pink cloth (cut from the yardage of a single polyester saree) from the major forks in the branches of a dark mango tree with wide outstretched arms. These pink braided lines ended in a small attached bell. Close by and part of the work was the covering of the open manhole drains by a glittering woven string mat on a square metal frame.

Radhika Vaidyanathan was able to transform the primary stage of a basket (made by a family of basket makers and weavers who lived near the Sikribagh gate) into spiders and webs. Installed from the branches of trees in clusters and silhouetted against the pond, they had a chimeric presence.



Anita Dube at work

Anita Dube, Untitled



Yoba Jonathan
Bridge for ants



Radhika Vaidyanathan
Untitled





Radhika Vaidyanathan
Untitled

Rini Tandon made a large spatially articulated earthwork of three circular shallow pits in the earth. These earth vessels, one like an earth whirlpool with a suction point off center, were stained by a pink and purple dye-colour solution poured from the edges. This enhanced the fragility of the watery stain against the solidity of the earth. **Subodh Gupta** created an open roofed fort-tower like circular structure by piling up cow dung cakes to the height of nearly 10 feet. This cell space could be entered through a doorway bearing ritual markers.

Simon Callery worked on two wall surfaces somehow locating the difference between the controlled environment of the studio and the weathered and stained wall surfaces he chose to engage with. In the second wall using two tones of red oxide, he used the shifting moving leafy shadows from the nearby mango tree as an extraordinary extension of the work.



Rini Tandon
Untitled

Rini Tandon, *Untitled*

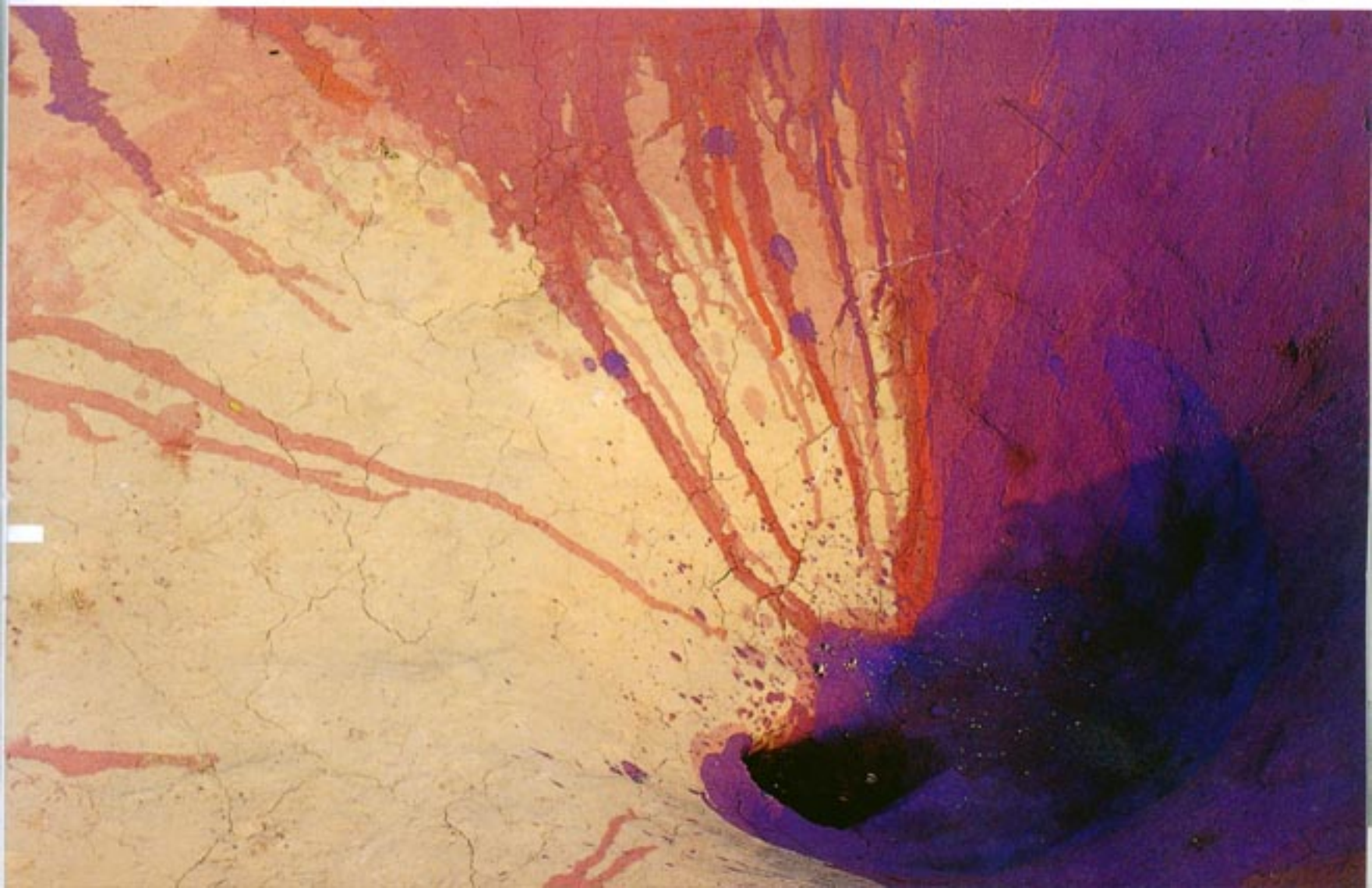




Photo : Sunny

Subodh Gupta
Untitled



Subodh Gupta at work



Simon Callery at work



Simon Callery
Untitled



Manisha Parekh
Untitled



Another exciting encounter during Khoj was one with materials in the local market. Lifted out of functionality by artists, these became repositories of memories, conceptual framing, formal properties, and many more things.

Manisha Parekh used brightly coloured wool to stitch wire shapes onto stained paper and locally available stools as three dimensional structures extending her work from the wall to the floor.

Surendran Nair used three belts available on the roadside, transforming these with a simplified aluminum casted form acting as a holder for feathers of a peacock, a peahen and a crow. A folktale or a parable could now be enacted allegorically with these significant costume markers.

Muhammed Cader 'composed' bidis and cigars on paper stained yellow, green and red - as a tongue in cheek crack at high modernism.



Surendran Nair
*Labyrinth, Prolapsus of prolixity;
Greed; Wound; A trade mark*

Muhammed Cader
Untitled



Surendran Nair
For the Nationalist
and other Birds

Stephen Hughes and **C.K.Rajan** chose to engage with the services of local sign painters. Stephen to produce multiple variations of 'Madonna' and also small motif signs (reminiscent of election symbols) - a scooter, an umbrella, a cow, an autorickshaw etc. Painted on rounded rocks, these were placed on a square platform of ice slabs in an enigmatic installation. Rajan with an enlarged Colgate paste carton and a matchbox of Ship Slims wanted to monumentalize a living and permanent relationship with the everyday and the functional. **Iftikhar Dadi** also related to the popular via images of starlets which he placed behind the bars of brightly coloured plastic combs used for removing lice. All this was filled tightly into a map of Pakistan outlined by a cement wall embedded with green glass shards. An ironic comment on the insidious workings of the seduction/propaganda machinery that disallows any real contact thus maintaining a status-quo of 'otherness'.



Stephen Hughes collecting his work *Three Mods* from the local painter.

Stephen Hughes
Bedrock





C.K. Rajan : Blacklight (left) and
'Two Candidates for Garbage' (right)





Iftekhar Dadi
*Kali Kali Zulfon Kay Phanday
 Top (detail)*



Photo : Dadi

Many artists also worked to transform found objects and materials to their own preoccupations. **Jyotee Kolte** used empty beer bottles as preservative containers for fragile traces of matter: leaves, feathers, sticks etc. **Ajay Desai** painted on fragments of nature, especially the dried remains from a palm tree - highlighting and intensifying the 'sensation' of the fragments with colour, assembling these into a poetic wall work. **P.S. Ladi** transformed an old accounting machine into a typewriter that released a personal pictographic code; while **Walter D'Souza** converted a wooden vault - horse like structure into perhaps the holy ghost with wings! **Sudershan Shetty** used the skills of technicians Aas and Yasin to weld a large phallic airplane - dressed in velvet, and **Gargi Raina** used clay as pigment to make images of water on paper.



Jyotee Kolte
FROM SOMEWHERE TO NOWHERE
OR HERE TO THERE OR ANYWHERE
TO EVERYWHERE





Ajay Desai
Untitled



P.S. Ladi
Untitled



Walter D'Souza, *Untitled*

Sudershan Shetty
Preparations for his work (left), *Untitled* (right)



Another significant aspect of Khoj was the visibility of differing culture-specific sensibilities evident in the attitude towards materials and processes. Even at the cost of generalizing I would like to point out the African will to Art in the spontaneous incorporation and assembling of poor and discarded materials with a scant regard for 'aesthetics' as we have come to understand it. **David Kolaone, Ludyeni Omega and Yoba Jonathan** could pick up junk fragments and weld them together, then paint them towards a non-formalist narrative. Old gunny cloth, used tea bags, old window/door frames, plastic strings etc, anything was used in defiant gestures that spoke of survival in bare material conditions.



Yoba Jonathan (top) and
Ludyeni Omega (bottom) at work



If this was one condition of spontaneity in which theater/theatricality was absent; in the work of **Luiz Gómez** spontaneity appeared as a politicized process of action; the ability to act publicly and swiftly. His stringing up of an inverted work table was as much an enjoyment in the collective organisation of that action, as it was subversive to catholic notions of the last supper, as it was metaphysical being airborne/suspended and marked with the names and telephone numbers of friends escaping Cuba.

These, then were briefly the highlights of Khoj 97. The search of course continues in our commitment to this annual event that can reveal and teach us more not only about our own practice but also that of others whom we did not previously know or understand.

The search within Khoj leads towards change.

Anita Dube
March 1998, New Delhi





Luis Gómez, Lightweight

REPORT

We established KHOJ, an independent artist-led initiative with the aim of creating a dynamic platform for cross-cultural encounters, interactions and collaboration to break new ground in the visual arts.

The KHOJ working group came together out of circumstances rather than by design. Having individually experienced international workshops invited by the Triangle Arts Trust in different parts of the world, we decided to establish a similar encounter in India.

Anna Kindersley and Robert Loder of the Triangle Arts Trust, London visited us in the winter of 1996. They were willing to help us with contacts and consultancy, and thus the seed for KHOJ was sown. Triangle Arts Trust put us in touch with Mr. S.K Modi of the Dayawati Modi Foundation who had shown interest in the idea and who graciously agreed to host the event. Having registered ourselves as an autonomous non-profit society, we felt we were off on a running start.

Eicher Gallery came along next with their generous offer to use their office facilities. This eased our burden in a big way and allowed us to get on with the rest of it.

Equipped as we were with major support from the above mentioned organisations, trouble hit us when we set out looking for funds for travel costs, materials, per diems, and the host of the other expenses involved in a project as large and complex as this. Our experience has revealed a sad lack of institutional support for innovative cultural projects. New ideas seem to be supported by a small handful of individuals, and there is only so much an individual can do. We also saw that support for the arts from the corporate world (with the rare exception) tended to be extremely conservative in nature. My ???? to them is that even if there is a precious past that needs to be preserved, surely we must also invest in the future yet to unfold, by building a resilient and open present.

Surprisingly while we received help from many generous individuals in India, the larger institutional support we received came from outside the country as may be seen from the list of sponsors. We do hope we shall not have to seek so far from home next time.

There were times when it seemed that this workshop would never happen; that perhaps we had taken on the impossible. The immense fund-raising effort was yielding only trickles, with time running short. Global networking and local organisations on this scale was alien territory for us; and within the working group there were personal tragedies, a new born baby, harried parents and overworked parties; but it all fell into place in the end.

As for the event itself; it was success quite beyond our expectations. The warmth and energy generated among the participants, the excellent infrastructural support from the Dayawati Modi Foundation and the spectacular venue left nothing to be desired. So did we think of the delectable fare dished out by the caterers in the kitchen who had us swooning.

Well looked after, we just got along with our work and a lot was achieved. The town of Modinagar at whose edge we were, entered the workshop in various ways. Everything from industrial junkyards to heaps of cowdung, and the local market place with its 'low-tech' wonders became a source for materials and ideas. So did the site itself, in response to which a lot of work was done. A range of local skills found their way into the work-shop when artists collaborated with metal casters, carpenters, a basket weaver, a charpoi weaver; at one point Stephen Hughes from the UK was even negotiating with a local butcher to realise his work! When this did not work out, he worked something out with a local sign board painter instead. One of Anita Dube's ideas involved the services of a bird catcher (!) but that didn't work out either. All kinds of natural materials

available on site were used. The interaction between the workshop, the venue and the locals couldn't have been more complete.

Being outside the confines of the studio seemed to have liberated something within for most of the artists: the freedom to experiment with the unfamiliar. For me personally, and for many of the participants, the event triggered movements in new directions, leaving us with something enriching and enduring.

This in itself is reason enough for the workshop to continue as an annual event.

Further, there were slide shows and discussions every evening. Talks would continue late into the night: interminable exchanges across cultures, the bridging of vast gulfs, the meeting of minds, the savouring of differences.

We had invited guest artists on three evenings who shared their work and experience with us: Sheba Chhachhi, Vivan Sundaram, Gulammohmad Sheikh and Satish Sharma who brought with them a range of perspectives and attitudes that helped in further widening the space of the workshop.

All this went into the making of an encounter that was on the one hand intense and exhausting, while on the other, utterly rejuvenating.

We have since, received from participants, letters and reports from across the world testifying to the fact that the experiences they had were transformative, lasting and special.

It would therefore seem that events such as these are important and necessary for the growth of an art scene that is open and dynamic; interactively engaged with the global art scenario.

Surely, greater local support than we encountered on this our first experience is due to initiatives such as these; so

that instead of remaining isolated from the rest of the world, we contribute positively towards a common yet heterogeneous cultured future based on co-operation, exchange and an appreciation of all that is unique to each society.

Ajay Desai
Coordinator, Khoj '97



REPORT

"Whatever you think you can do or believe you can do, begin it. Action has magic, grace and power in it."

Following a wonderful introduction to India in 1987, teaching at Dayawati Modi Public School near Rae Bareilly, Satish and Abha Modi followed my involvement in workshops in Africa with interest and we discussed setting up a similar initiative in India. Supported by Triangle Arts Trust and the Dayawati Modi Foundation, David Koloane and myself had a fascinating trip in 1994, meeting and seeing work of many artists from Delhi and outside the city.

Over the next two years, Triangle Arts Trust arranged for artists from Delhi to go to workshops in Africa and UK. These artists formed the Khoj Working group during my second visit in 1996 with Robert Loder. The essential support of the Dayawati Modi Foundation together with the commitment and energy of the core group, particularly Ajay Desai and Manisha Parekh, ensured that the workshop was an unprecedented success.

The workshop took place in the open and inspiring setting of the formal gardens of Sikri Bagh situated on the edge of Modinagar, an industrial town north of Delhi. 22 artists

worked together for the first time from countries including Namibia, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Cuba and Australia.

'Khoj' (urdu): 'to quest' or 'to search.' The quest was challenging and enlightening through the meeting of artists from different cultures and continents. Spiralling energy in the midst of meaningful exchange and dialogue over the two weeks. It was a time of learning about oneself and new friends from different corners of the globe without agendas or labels. A catalyst for opening oneself up (the workshop can touch all senses and emotions) and for experimenting with new processes and media. Moving forward into new possibilities.

While the experience has particular significance to each person and for some it is a revelation, there is a pervading spirit of togetherness: moving towards a common unspoken goal. Process is the essence of the workshop: the process of making art, creating change, discovering and forging new links with like-minded artists who live on the other side of the world.

Anna Kindersley
International Workshop Co-ordinator



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