GALLERY
ISABELLE
VAN DEN
EYNDE

PRESS RELEASE

VIKRAM DIVECHA

Towards Opacity

14 January – 14 March 2020
Preview: Monday, 13 January from 6 to 10 pm

The relationship between wood and sunlight (detail), 2018, Scrap pieces from Columbia University woodshop, white marker, laminated plywood, metal frame, Ikea floor lamp

It takes approximately ten minutes for the photoreceptive cone cells in the eye to adapt to the dark. This is roughly the running time of the looping audio narration in Divecha's Gallery 354 (2019), the immersive installation that sets the central premise to Vikram Divecha's solo-exhibition *Towards Opacity.* We enter a barely lit photography darkroom - as our pupils adjust, we are made cognizant of the ways in which vision is inherent to subjectivity. Guided by Divecha's voice, we partake of an aesthetic experience that unfolds at the creeping pace of what is known in ocular biology as "dark adaptation." Simultaneously, the voice on the audio narration ushers us metaphorically into Gallery 354: an exhibition hall at the Metropolitan Museum of Art that houses objects from Melanesia. One particularity of Gallery 354 is its subdued lighting, which one encounters after walking through the brightly lit Greek and Roman wing. It was this shift in lighting, observed by Divecha upon his repeated visits to the museum, that triggered his investigations about vision and darkness. In *Towards Opacity*, Divecha engages with two distinct apparatuses of capture and display - the Metropolitan Museum of Art and his iPhone SE - in order to explore notions of failure, fugitivity and opacity.

On one of Divecha's trips to the MET, he had intended to photograph some of the Melanesian ancestral objects on view, but all that was captured was blank images. The darkroom *Gallery 354* (2019) we enter is a memorial to failure, where one finds the traces of a charged encounter - a resistance to representation by an exhibited object, already opaque to the museum goer. If there is any identity to be found in the darkroom, then it is in the recorded voice, which a 19th century German poet, once described as "the true photograph of the soul". Divecha's recorded narration speaks in order to tell us of a voice that is other than his own, reverberating in an uncharted region – his unconscious starts to speak. In other words, what we hear is that "je est un autre" (I is another) of Rimbaud. This is the same affirmation of self-difference that Martinique-born philosopher Edouard Glissant invokes when he affirms opacity as a common denominator in the errant and unfinished work of Relation. In contravention of the museum's ordained mode of spectatorship and comprehension, Divecha encounters these museum objects as an opaque echo of what was always, already within himself. He explains "These objects speak to me of another space, another period, possibly located within myself".

In a continuing gesture of embracing multiple voices in his work, Divecha collected scraps from the wood shop at Columbia University to piece together *The relationship between wood and sunlight* (2018). This work was conceived as a model - or a three-dimensional sketch from memory - of the objects in Gallery 354. The fact that it is assembled from the discarded remainders of other artists' labor already suggests a degree of authorial relinquishment. By seeking out discarded pieces of wood that often only vaguely resemble his already imperfect mental images of the objects in the museum, Divecha echoes the initial opacity of those displayed objects. At the same time, the installation's single light source evokes the direct sunlight that the Melanesian objects at the MET are protected from by massive shades installed on the museum's Southwest facing windows. Extracted from its immediate museological context, the maquette of remainders can be thought of as an absurd commentary on the museum's painstaking efforts for preservation.

In a series of colour block paintings titled *Lazy Loading* (2019–) Divecha shifts his focus from the museum to another apparatus of display - the smartphone - that has transformed everyday experience into one perpetually infiltrated by a smaller scale but no less captivating spectacle of display. Lazy loading is a programming feature that defers the loading of information. It is noticeable when scrolling quickly through a search on Google Images. For a fraction of a second, multiple monochrome color blocks appear on the screen in the place of the images loading. Divecha screen-captured this fugitive, interstitial moment by using a weak internet signal, which slows down the loading process. He then consulted various painters in New York to discuss at length the colors displayed in these screenshots, learning their color mixing techniques. Back in his studio, Divecha patiently mixes pigments to color-match the monochrome blocks on the digital screen in an attempt to recreate the images

Google Images search entry: Displaces; Device: iPhone SE (A1723); Display aspect ratio 16:9, 2019
Oil on canvas

in oil on canvas. The result is another art of failure, since, for all his efforts, the color-matching seems to be inevitably flawed. In the final works, each block of pigment represents a more discrete image held in a state of non-arrival. Exhibited in a formation that conjures the vertical scroll, the paintings refer to the hyper-efficiency of the computer age to eventually engage in a poetics of deceleration.

At the origin and endpoint of this body of work is the desire for a more complex exposure - Divecha has proposed to the MET a light intervention which would be operating the massive blinds in Gallery 354. This proposal is still under consideration by the institution. Like each of the works in this exhibition, the intervention suggests a rethought relation to the apparatuses of capture and display, and a turn toward the shadowy regions in which fugitivity becomes form and the self becomes another.

Artist Bio

Beirut-born, Mumbai-bred, Vikram Divecha works between New York and Dubai. He holds an MFA in Visual Art from Columbia University (2019) and is currently a participant of the Whitney Museum's Independent Study Program (2019-20). Divecha's projects often bring invisible structures into plain view, to raise questions about agency, ethics and value. His conceptual and collaborative practice has developed around what he calls 'found processes' - those forces and capacities at work within state, social, economic and industrial spheres. Interrogating specific environments, Divecha's endeavors often see him realigning social and urban systems to generate an altered, amplified outcome as the operation runs its course. The changes he initiates are not simply injected into a system and then showcased; rather, Divecha's are slow processes, capable of enduring well beyond the time/space framework of what is 'exhibited', in some cases generating sustained social associations. Despite interacting with largely invisible systems, his works have a definite materiality and formal rigour. Divecha's engagements translate into site-specific works, public art, installations, video, photography and drawings.

Exhibitions include: *Second Hand*, Jameel Arts Center, UAE (2019); *Living Room: UIT (Use it together)*, ISCP, New York (2019); *Who Are We Now?*, Land Art Mongolia 5th Biennial, Mongolia (2018); *Rock, Paper, Scissors: Positions in Play*, National Pavilion UAE, 57th Venice Biennale (2017); *Tamawuj*, Sharjah Biennial 13 (2017); *Co-Lab*, Louvre Abu Dhabi, UAE (2017); *Minor Work*, Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai (2017). Divecha was recipient of the 2014 Middle East Emergent Artist Prize.

The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue comprising an essay by David Stephenson Markus entitled "Fugitivity as Form: Vikram Divecha's *Towards Opacity"*

For any further information or press related requests, please contact April Morais at april@ivde.net.