This page, from top: **Ashok Sukumaran,** *Glow Positioning System (GPS)*, 2005, assorted decorative lights, steel crank, custom hardware, and software. Installation view, Kabutarkhana intersection, Mint Road, Mumbai. Photo: Shaina Anand. **Sharmila Samant,** *Shanghai Tales,* 2006, video projection, 13 minutes. Installation view, Frankfurter Kunstverein. Opposite page, top: **IMAX Adlabs Theatre, suburban Mumbai, 2002.** Photograph from "Mumbai SubUrban Fables" (2002–), a component of PUKAR's "Post-Industrial Landscapes" archive and research project (2001–). Photo: Pankaj Joshi. Middle row, left: **Laborers in a salvage yard, Mumbai, 2004.** Photograph from "Infra-City" (2002–), a component of PUKAR's "Post-Industrial Landscapes" archive and research project (2001–). Photo: Vyjayanthi Rao. Right: **India United Mill, central Mumbai, 2006.** Photograph from "Infra-City" (2002–), a component of PUKAR's "Post-Industrial Landscapes" archive and research project (2001–). Photo: Vyjayanthi Rao. Bottom: **Madhushree Dutta,** *Seven Islands and a Metro,* 2006, still from a color video, 100 minutes.

AT THE KABUTARKHANA intersection, a major traffic nexus in Mumbai, thousands of lights sparkle on buildings silhouetted against the night sky. These strings of lights, the kind normally used for festivals and weddings, are everywhere at the crossing, illuminating the General Post Office (a glorious example of Mumbai's Indo-Saracenic architecture) and adjacent stores and restaurants, draped over trees and across streets, blinking on and off. But while these lights might look like the trappings of an extravagant civic celebration, they actually comprise artist Ashok Sukumaran's *Glow Positioning System (GPS),* 2005. Using a software-controlling hand crank that, when turned by pedestrians, powers the lights, Sukumaran (who presented his work this year at the first Singapore Biennale) has transformed the busy thoroughfare into a fantastic panorama—and indeed, into a kind of beacon for a new Indian art scene whose denizens deploy electronic and digital media, as well as video, film, and interdisciplinary research practices, to address the urban landscape and population.

There are many megalopolises in India, but Mumbai is the one that showcases the country's economic growth—and its internal rifts. Its cityscape has undergone massive development in recent years, and the trend continues: According to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the Mumbai-Shanghai plan, a controversial development scheme designed to pack the city's skyline with the starchitecture of a globalized metropolis (enabling Mumbai, per the plan's name, to compete with the glitter of modern Shanghai), will have completely transformed the city by 2010. And yet 60 percent of Mumbai's sixteen million inhabitants presently live either in Dharavi—home to more than a million people, making it the largest slum in all of Asia—or in one of the city's many other impoverished areas. This reality does not match up with the municipal self-image being fostered by Mumbai, of course, and so countless slums are being torn down. (Further underlining the divide between image and reality, Maximum City, home of Ramoji Film City—the largest film production company in the world—actually abuts Dharavi.) Paradoxically enough, the Mumbai-Shanghai plan's focus on the visible symptoms of overpopulation and poverty, rather than its causes, has thus far recapitulated many of the Chinese city's urban-planning failures—already leaving, for example, at least two hundred thousand people displaced in the slums' deconstruction.

Appropriately, many artists and interdisciplinary groups here specifically engage the problems of the city with both public projects and more conventional

works of art—creating a unique theoretical link between urbanism and critical artistic production. There is, for example, the artist Sharmila Samant, cofounder of the collective Open Circle (whose work focuses on the impact of economic reforms on the working class). This year, Samant notably made *Shanghai Tales*, a documentary video showing the demolition of a slum from the point of view of a little boy, intercutting his narrative with photocopied images of anti-displacement protests from media NGOs and television networks. (Prominent on the Mumbai scene, Samant may also be familiar to some Western audiences, having studied at Rijks Academy in Amsterdam before appearing in the 2005 exhibition "Indian Summer" at L'École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and in 2001's "Century City" at Tate Modern in London.) More steeped in research is the innovative nonprofit institution PUKAR (Partners for Urban Knowledge Action and Research), founded in 2001 by globalization theorist Arjun Appadurai to develop collaborations among theoreticians, architects, artists, and city dwellers. Mumbai itself provides the conceptual impetus behind PUKAR's numerous ongoing projects, which typically analyze the local ramifications of globalization via conferences, lectures, publications, and exhibitions. For a project titled "Gender and Space," for instance, the group assembled a traveling show with works by four photographers:


Among them, Abhinandita Mathur portrays the changing daily habits of a young girl who moved from a village to Mumbai, and Neelam Ayare follows women in the city who are newly working side by side with men on construction sites. In 2006, PUKAR sponsored the study "Post-Industrial Landscapes," examining and documenting the global economic shift from manufacturing to service industries. A key element of the project was a documentary titled *The Forgotten City of Girangaon*. Featured in this year's Juhu Film Festival in Mumbai, the piece dwelled poetically on the cylindrical skyscrapers rapidly replacing the chimneys of the city's old cotton mills.

This filmic endeavor is close in spirit to the "on the ground" efforts of another organization, CRIT (Collective Research Initiatives Trust), a similar network of architects, scholars, and artists who blend theory and practice in what they call a "critical urbanism." Currently, the group is organizing neighborhood committees to help stem the forces of development threatening the tenements of Mumbai's Betwala Chawl, which has been squatted by a migrant group from Allahabad for more than seventy-five years; CRIT is hoping to create in its place a legal, community-oriented housing complex combining apartments and work spaces that could serve the real needs of this low-income group. Finally, there is Majlis, the Centre for Alternative Culture and Rights Discourse, a production facilitator and archive for documentary film that also provides advice on civil rights issues to women and minorities. One of the center's most ambitious works to date was this year's *Seven Islands and a Metro*, a feature-length documentary by the organization's director, Madhushree Dutta. Shot in a dark, moody palette, Dutta's video narrates the history of the city from its sixteenth-century founding as Bom Bahia, to its colonial incarnation as Bombay, to its new life as Mumbai, the polyglot, postindustrial metropolis. Reminiscent of Chris Marker's travel films in its essayistic approach, idiosyncratic use of film genres, and poetic use of oral history, *Seven Islands* confirms Majlis's international reputation as a film center facilitating first-class productions even without ample means.

While globalization is unmistakably shaping urban space, its harsh economic imperatives make it increasingly difficult to live off the land—a fact that preoccupies artist Chintan Upadhyay, who has since 2002 organized site-specific workshops and monthlong residencies for Indian and international artists in the Vagad region of Rajasthan. In 2006, Hüseyin Alptekin and Scott Martin were among the artists who sojourned there, working on projects with villagers that were much in the vein of the "social turn" among contemporary artists around the world—including street theater as well as a small museum displaying objects

Many artists and collectives specifically engage the problems of Mumbai—the megalopolis that best showcases India's economic growth and internal rifts—creating a unique link between urbanism and critical artistic productions.
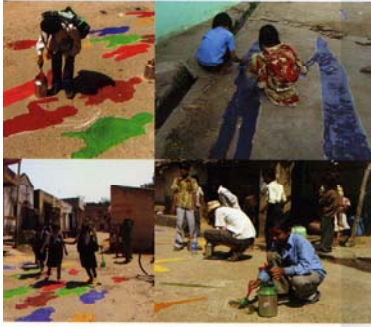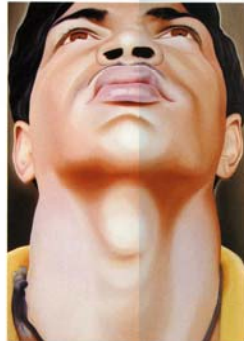
donated by locals. Significantly, in creating this program intended to effect communication between urban and rural areas, Upadhyay eschews the traditional figurative painting he studied in the prestigious art program at the Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda, Gujarat. In this respect, he is arguably part of a larger groundswell of Indian contemporary artists distancing themselves from mainstream forms of Indian art (especially painting and sculpture that, by drawing on age-old pictorial conventions and religious iconography, seem to endorse traditional values). This cohort includes Sukumaran and his *Glow Positioning System*, but also such increasingly recognized artists as Shaina Anand and Shilpa Gupta. Among Anand's more interesting investigations of film and television genres is *Rustle TV*, 2005, a project for which the artist asked people working and shopping in an indoor market in Bangalore to produce, star in, and broadcast game shows, speakers' forums, and song-and-dance production numbers over the course of three days. For her part, Gupta, a participant in four biennials this year—Shanghai, Sydney, Havana, and Liverpool—examines a culture steeped in consumption, militarism, and human-rights abuses with such interactive video projections or Internet projects as blessed-bandwidth.net, which she created in 2003 for Tate Online. Suggesting that religion today must be seen in the broader context of commodifiable lifestyle choices, the piece asks users to select a religion—say, Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhist—from a drop-down list, and then have themselves and their computers electronically blessed. Her untitled installation for the 2006 Biennale of Sydney, meanwhile, used touch screens in its exploration of the conflict in Kashmir.

Such projects represent only one end of Mumbai's contemporary art spectrum, of course. The city is also the center of India's small but thriving commercial gallery scene and, in addition to all the projects mentioned above, there are also the so-called Bombay Boys—a group of successful young painters including Bose Krishnamachari, Riyas Komu, Justin Ponmany, and Jitish Kallat, who could often be found this year smiling from the newspapers' gossip pages, standing next to film stars at glittery parties. Like the stock exchange, the market for their work is booming, nourished by the profits of Bollywood and the fast-growing IT industry. Business this year was brisk at the Sakshi Gallery, which sells much of the Bombay Boys' eclectically postmodernist, frequently figurative work. It is important to note that the city's public art museums look particularly etiolated compared to this high-rolling milieu, mainly showing traditional painting (such as last year's retrospective of Jehangir Sabavala, organized by poet and curator Ranjit Hoskote) rather than playing an active role in the nurturing of contemporary work. One venue trying to fill this void is the "semiprofit" Gallery Chemould. Founded by the husband-and-wife team of Kekoo and Khorshed Gandhy in 1963, the gallery promoted then-controversial work, like the paintings of Bhupen Khakhar (1934–2003), whose imagery alluded to popular culture and was often explicitly homoerotic, and that of the anticolonialist Progressive Artists' Group. Today the founders' daughter, Shireen Gandhy, shows adventurous work such

From top: **Scott Martin**, *Playing Shadows*, 2006, community workshop, Partapur, Rajasthan, India. **Shilpa Gupta**, *Untitled* (detail), 2005–2006, interactive installation with wall drawing, touch screens, and computers, dimensions variable. Photo: Greg Weight. **Riyas Komu**, *Holy Land – 1*, 2006, oil on canvas, 78 x 54".

as the ironic self-portraits of photographer Pushpamala N.—these look a bit like Bollywood production stills—and invites guest curators to organize group exhibitions, providing one of the few places in Mumbai where artists might have a space for experimentation.

Gallery Chemould notwithstanding, the more general economic disparities of India are perhaps reflected in the divide between the artists who show and sell within the gallery system and those who actively engage political realities. Like any other major city's, Mumbai's art world mirrors the fragmented state of contemporary art in general—except perhaps even more so. It is the Maximum City, after all, its every quality exaggerated. But to at least provisionally locate a center in this multifaceted heterogeneity, initiatives like PUKAR, CRIT, and Majlis, by directly confronting the aesthetic, economic, social, and psychological conditions of the hyper-hypertrophied megalopolis, may well constitute the city's most robust and compelling artistic activity. Perhaps best seen, after all, as the Mumbai-Shanghai plan's opposing force rather than as the antithesis of Bombay Boy painting, the practices of these groups illuminate the potential of "critical urbanism." And as students of demography or readers of, say, Mike Davis's *Planet of Slums* might agree, that is a concept that should be of interest far beyond the outskirts of Mumbai. □

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Translated from German by Jane Brodie.