



Priya's Shakti, street art made using augmented reality (2014)

<< Keeping it real

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app to create a self-portrait, in collaboration with Otoy, a special effects company, and HTC (for its Vive headset). Then, at a collateral event of the Venice Biennale in 2017, one saw a powerful creation by artist Christian Lemmerz that evoked mixed feelings of beauty, excess, death, and pain. Presented by Khora Contemporary, a Danish VR production company for artists, *Le Apparizione* engaged the viewer through a discomfiting close-up with a burning corpse of Jesus Christ, which "rained" embers and golden blood.

In India, *Gradient Descent* was the country's first group show in which the final image was generated by Artificial Intelligence. Hosted by Nature Morte, Delhi, in August this year, and curated by the Bengaluru-based curation and research collective, 64/1, the exhibition raised key questions about the increasing role of machines in the realm of Contemporary art, and, consequently, its impact on the role and agency of artists in the creative process.

This has also allowed artists—especially street artists and comic-book creators—to make their works more evocative and widely viewed by enabling them access to the interface of a viewer's smartphone. AR, for one, is being used extensively in Miami's art district. Another example of this is *Priya's Shakti*, one of the first comic books to use AR to create a discourse around gender-based violence. "From the beginning, I wanted the comic book to have an interactive component that will be both playful and accessible, with interactive elements jump-

ing off pages, and a reach extended to teens in India and around the world," says Ram Devineni, who creates these series in collaboration with artist Dan Goldman and writers such as Paromita Vohra. While developing the stories, the team, (which was also the first to start using AR in street art in 2013), interviewed many sexual assault and acid attack survivors, and it became critical to embed those into the comic book. AR allowed them to do this successfully. There are plans now to have an augmented comic book exhibition, starting July 2019, at Sherone's Hangout in Agra.

However, artists are clear that tools such as AI and AR shouldn't be used just for the sake of it, rather they should be the means to take

an emotion further. For instance, in *Franchise Freedom*, Studio Drift used hundreds of Intel drones as carriers of lights and executors of performance, which made it seem as if a luminous flock of starlings had appeared in the sky. However, the work was not about the drone, but about the feeling the collective wanted to leave with the audience. The idea was to expose the tension between individual freedom and safety in numbers. In *Ritual of Exile*, artist Poulomi Basu documented dangerous rituals that subjugated women in south Asia in the name of religion. She used immersive VR to bring the viewer emotionally close to the subject, but not to overpower the message in any way. "In our work we use technology, but it is never about that alone. Technology comes directly from nature. We are nature, and technology helps in our existence and evolution. The more we work with technology to recreate natural processes in our work, the more we understand that nature is the real high tech in our world," mention Lonneke Gordin and Ralph Nauta of Studio Drift over an email interview.>



Artist Jonathan Yeo

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—LONNEKE GORDIN AND RALPH NAUTA

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