

Award-winning artist Amar Kanwar to exhibit two solo projects in a landmark collaboration between The NYUAD Art Gallery and Ishara Art Foundation

Such a Morning opens at Ishara Art Foundation in Alserkal Avenue, Dubai, from January 20 to May 20, 2020
The Sovereign Forest opens at The NYU Abu Dhabi Art Gallery in the capital from January 22 to May 30, 2020



[From left to right: (1) Amar Kanwar, *The Scene of Crime* (installation view from *The Sovereign Forest*). Courtesy of artist and Marian Goodman Gallery. Photo: Henrik Stromberg. (2) Amar Kanwar, *Such a Morning* (film still). Courtesy of artist. Photo: Amar Kanwar Studio.]

United Arab Emirates (UAE), October 14, 2019: In a groundbreaking collaboration across Abu Dhabi and Dubai, The NYU Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) Art Gallery and Ishara Art Foundation will both open solo projects in spring 2020 by Amar Kanwar, one of India's most critically-acclaimed and internationally-exhibited contemporary artists. The award-winning artist explores the politics and intricacies of power, violence, and justice, through poetic films and comprehensive multimedia works.

The Ishara Art Foundation, a non-profit institution dedicated to contemporary South Asian art and artists in West Asia, will host *Such a Morning* (2017) from January 20 to May 20, while **The NYUAD Art Gallery**, the University's academic museum-gallery, will show *The Sovereign Forest* from January 22 to May 30.

Chairperson at Ishara Art Foundation, Smita Prabhakar, comments: "Our goal at Ishara Art Foundation is to champion South Asian voices and share compelling contemporary artistic practices. This collaboration with The NYUAD Art Gallery allows us to bring audiences in the UAE an even greater depth of work by Amar Kanwar, offering a comprehensive introduction to the practice of one of South Asia's foremost artists. *Such a Morning* is a key work by the artist, offering us deep insight into how we might face contemporary challenges. As a new member of the UAE arts community, we are honoured to work alongside NYUAD Art Gallery on this presentation, and look forward to future collaborations that benefit and grow our shared audiences."

Chief Curator at NYU Abu Dhabi and Executive Director of The NYUAD Art Gallery, Maya Allison, comments: "This is an exceptionally exciting exhibition and collaboration for The NYUAD Art Gallery. I'm delighted that our collaboration will enable audiences here to have the rare experience of seeing two such major Amar Kanwar projects in proximity. It is a unique privilege to host his thought-provoking and critically important work. *The Sovereign Forest* is, in many ways, a 'living' art work, one that continues to grow and shift

with each installation, as do the questions it brings to light. The opening of the Ishara Art Foundation earlier this year marks an important new chapter for South Asian art in the UAE. When we opened our doors five years ago, I hoped we would one day see such a trans-institutional collaboration – one that benefits our university faculty and students, as well as our broader UAE audiences.”

About *Such a Morning* at Ishara Art Foundation

Such a Morning (2017) is a feature-length film installation, which premiered internationally at documenta 14 in Athens, Greece, and Kassel, Germany. The fictional narrative which follows two central characters who grapple with a hallucinatory world is a parable for the complex challenges of our times. **Kanwar** asks: “What is it that lies beyond, when all arguments are done with? How to reconfigure and respond again?”

The film follows an aging mathematics professor who retreats from his career, seeking isolation in an abandoned train carriage. Creating a zone of darkness so as to acclimatize himself before total darkness descends, the professor begins to live in a realm bereft of light. The many iterations and sensory possibilities of darkness and visibility are explored as he gradually screens out all the light and enters a subjective world. A parallel story about a woman emerges within the course of the film, providing a compelling, analogous narrative to the protagonist’s. Meanwhile, the professor records his epiphanies and visions in an almanac of the dark, an examination of 49 types of darkness that emerge as a series of letters which are exhibited alongside the film.

Kanwar conceived a narrative that continues beyond the film – the professor continues to write his letters – towards a research project with diverse artistic, pedagogic, metaphysical, and political collaborations. These become the rubric for a continuing project, and are at the core of the series of *Letters* that accompany the film. The paper for *Letters* was hand-made by Sherna Dastur at the Nirupama Academy of Paper, Kolkata, India.

The seven *Letters* contain texts, 17 video projections, and 45 light projections. The train coach built for the film remains in Delhi, a memorial for the teacher who refused to conform, who stepped off the tracks, and wandered into the wild. The themes of survival and perseverance are deep sources to draw on, resulting in a thought-provoking and compelling presentation. *Such a Morning* offers a rich lens for audiences to contemplate these core themes from a South Asian perspective, focusing on issues relevant to global audiences today.

Such a Morning was edited by Sameera Jain, with cinematography by Dilip Varma and additional cinematography by Ranjan Palit. Sound recording was completed by Suresh Rajamani and Julius Basaiawmoit, and designed by Sherna Dastur. It was produced with the support of the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art in New Delhi, AKF Productions, and Marian Goodman Gallery.

Ishara Art Foundation is presented in partnership with Alserkal Avenue.

About *The Sovereign Forest* at The NYUAD Art Gallery

The Sovereign Forest at The NYUAD Art Gallery is an ongoing multimedia installation that is a creative response to crime, politics, human rights, and ecological crisis. It evolved out of the political and environmental conflict in the resource-rich, and largely tribal Indian state of Odisha. Kanwar has been observing and documenting the industrial interventions that have irrevocably altered Odisha’s landscape for more than a decade. *The Sovereign Forest* is a long-term commitment of the artist with media activist Sudhir Pattnaik, and designer and filmmaker Sherna Dastur.

The Sovereign Forest is inspired by a search for the possible answers to the following questions: How to understand crime and the conflict around us? Who defines evidence? Can "poetry" be used as "evidence" in a trial? How do we see, know, understand, and remember disappearances? How to look again?

Multiple works make up *The Sovereign Forest*, which has appeared in different iterations. At its core are two films: *The Scene of the Crime* (2011), a film that documents landscapes selected for industrial development prior to their obliteration, and *A Love Story* (2010), about the experience of that loss. The installation will include three large handmade books, *The Counting Sisters and Other Stories* (2011), *The Prediction* (1991–2012), and *The Constitution* (2012) with their own films projected on its pages. Containing local fables, stories

of the incarcerated, and pieces of “evidence” such as a fishing net, a cloth garment, rice seeds, a betel leaf, and newspaper embedded inside the paper, visitors are encouraged to turn the pages and read these stories. In an adjacent gallery, an edition of *The Listening Bench* (2013) will also be presented, where visitors can hear an audio track from the project. In many ways, *The Sovereign Forest* expands upon a theme that has become central to The NYUAD Art Gallery’s program offering: that of landscape as a frame for reflection and examination of where we are, both culturally and physically.

The Sovereign Forest’s two films, *The Scene of Crime* and *A Love Story*, were edited by Sameera Jain with cinematography by Dilip Varma. The exhibition design, book design, and paper making were all executed by Sherna Dastur. It was produced with the support of Samadrusti, Odisha; Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK; documenta 13, Kassel; and Public Press, New Delhi.

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Notes to Editors

About Amar Kanwar

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Kanwar has distinguished himself through films and multi-media works, which explore the politics of power, violence, and justice. Recent solo exhibitions have been at Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid and Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris (2019), Tate Modern, London (2018), Bildmuseet, Umea, Sweden (2017), Goethe Institut Mumbai and NTU CCA Singapore (2016), Assam State Museum, India (2015). In 2013 and 2014 at the Art Institute of Chicago; Yorkshire Sculpture Park; TBA 21, Vienna and at Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland (2012).

Kanwar has also participated in documenta 11, 12, 13, and 14 in Kassel, Germany (2002, 2007, 2012, 2017). Other solo exhibitions have been at Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2008), Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (2007), National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo (2006) and the Renaissance Society, Chicago (2004). Kanwar has been the recipient of awards such as the Prince Claus Award (2017); Annenberg / Creative Time Prize for Art and Social Change (2014); Honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts, Maine College of Art, USA (2006); Edvard Munch Award for Contemporary Art, Norway (2005); Golden Gate Award, San Francisco International Film Festival, USA (1999), Golden Conch, Mumbai International Film Festival, India (1998).

About Ishara Art Foundation

www.ishara.org

Ishara Art Foundation is a new non-profit organisation focused on contemporary art from a South Asian context. We have an expansive definition of the region, which includes the diaspora and overlapping histories of the region around India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Given the multiple links to South Asia within the Gulf, our programme is anchored in a regional approach and designed to share compelling artistic perspectives with local and international audiences. Our programme presents new and established practices

through exhibitions and commissions which develop new dialogues and explore regional interconnections. Guided by a research-led approach, Ishara supports the participation of South Asian voices within the lively art, culture and design community of the UAE.

Ishara Art Foundation is presented in partnership with Alserkal Avenue.
@isharaartfoundation

About Alserkal Avenue
www.alserkalavenue.ae

Established in 2008 by Alserkal, Alserkal Avenue is a renowned cultural district of contemporary art galleries, non-profit organisations and homegrown businesses in the Al Quoz industrial area of Dubai. Alserkal Avenue is a vibrant community of visual and performing arts organisations, designers, and artisanal spaces that have become an essential platform for the development of the creative industries in the United Arab Emirates. As one of the region's foremost platforms for contemporary art, Alserkal Avenue provides cultural experiences for local, regional and international audiences. Alserkal Avenue features Concrete, a multi-disciplinary space conceptualised and programmed by Alserkal.

Concrete was inaugurated in 2017 as the first building in the UAE to be completed by the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA), founded by Rem Koolhaas, and is an adaptable venue whose ability to metamorphose to bring creative visions to life makes it suitable for international, museum-grade exhibitions as well as events across art, design, fashion and the performing arts. Concrete was shortlisted for the 2019 Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

About The NYU Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) Art Gallery
www.nyuad-artgallery.org

The NYUAD Art Gallery is an academic museum-gallery that presents work by internationally-established artists, curators, and scholars, to serve the intellectual and creative dialogue among the university and wider communities, via topics of regional relevance and international significance. The platform supports scholarly and experimental installations, artists' projects, guest curators, and landmark exhibitions, with an emphasis on projects that engage the uniquely non-commercial, experimental, and scholarly role of a University.

@nyuadartgallery

About NYU Abu Dhabi
www.nyuad.nyu.edu

NYU Abu Dhabi is the first comprehensive liberal arts and science campus in the Middle East to be operated abroad by a major American research university. NYU Abu Dhabi has integrated a highly-selective liberal arts, engineering and science curriculum with a world center for advanced research and scholarship enabling its students to succeed in an increasingly interdependent world and advance cooperation and progress on humanity's shared challenges. NYU Abu Dhabi's high-achieving students have come from 115 nations and speak over 115 languages. Together, NYU's campuses in New York, Abu Dhabi, and Shanghai form the backbone of a unique global university, giving faculty and students opportunities to experience varied learning environments and immersion in other cultures at one or more of the numerous study-abroad sites NYU maintains on six continents.