

Ashish Avikunthak: Short Films

March 1 – March 10, 2012

Press Preview & V.I.P. Screening: Thursday, March 1, 6:00pm – 9:00pm

Featuring Artist's Discussion and Q&A with Richard Suchenski, Bard College

New York, 35 Great Jones Street



Ashish Avikunthak, Still from *Vakratunda Swaha*, 2010, 35mm, 21 min.

Aicon Gallery, New York's leading venue for Modern and Contemporary South Asian art, is pleased to present two short films by experimental filmmaker **Ashish Avikunthak**. *Kalighat Fetish* (1999) and *Vakratunda Swaha* (2010) bookend a decade of Avikunthak's filmmaking career and present an in-depth exploration of a number of critical themes in his work. As film writer Parag Amladi states, "anthropology and cinema, the persistence of epic and mythic structures in daily modern life, the intermingling of the sacred and the quotidian, and the narrative echoes of the old and archaic" are just some of the recurring motifs through which

Avikunthak's films, using modernist cinema techniques, seek to examine and deconstruct post-colonial Indian culture.

The film *Kalighat Fetish* attempts to negotiate with the duality that is associated with the ceremonial veneration of the Mother Goddess Kali - the presiding deity of Kolkata. It delves into the subliminal layers of consciousness, underlying the ritual of Kali worship. The film ruminates on the nuanced trans-sexuality that is prevalent in the ceremonial performance of male devotees cross-dressing as Kali, in an act of obsessive devotion. The film has been widely shown worldwide, and in 2006 *Kalighat Fetish* was featured in a Tate Modern retrospective on Indian Experimental Film and Video from 1913–2006. In 2001 it won the Best Documentary award at the Tampere Film Festival.

Of the film *Vakratunda Swaha*, Avikunthak says "in 1997, I filmed a sequence - a friend immersing an idol of Ganesha at Chowpati beach, Bombay on the last day of the Ganapati festival. A year later, he committed suicide. After twelve years, I completed the film. Using his footage as the leitmotif, this film is a requiem to a dead friend." Presented as a series of non-linear, self-referencing scenes woven together into a complex circular narrative, the film functions as a meditation on loss, expiation, role-play and ritual. Throughout the film, use of the modernist cinematic trope of reverse motion gives rise to haunting scenes embodying the

humane but flawed desire of those in mourning to seek ways in which to undo tragic events that have befallen them. This will be the American premiere of *Vakratunda Swaha*. The film, along with *Kalighat Fetish*, was most recently shown at the Centre Pompidou, Paris and at Zacheta National Gallery for Art, Warsaw.

Born in Jabalpur, India in 1972, Ashish Avikunthak has been working as a film artist for more than fifteen years. His films have been shown worldwide in film festivals, galleries and museums. Notable screenings were at the Tate Modern, London, Centre George Pompidou, Paris, Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, along with London, Locarno, Rotterdam, and Berlin film festivals among other locations. He has had retrospective of his works at Goethe Institute, Calcutta (2004), Les Inattendus, Lyon (2006), Yale University (2008) and the National Centre for Performing Arts, Mumbai (2008). He has a PhD in cultural anthropology from Stanford University and has taught at Yale University. He is now an Assistant Professor of Film Media at the Harrington School of Communication & Media, University of Rhode Island.



Ashish Avikunthak , Still from *Kalighat Fetish*, 1999, 16mm, 23 min.

Please contact Aicon Gallery (Andrew@Aicongallery.com) for more information.