

Left

HEMAN CHONG

Calendars (2020-2096)

2004–10

A page from the installation of 1,001 calendars, at the NUS Museum, Singapore, 2011.

Courtesy National University Singapore Museum.

Right

ROHINI DEVASHER

Bloodlines

2010

Video still.

Courtesy Gallery Nature Morte, New Delhi.

NEW DELHI NATURE MORTE

Rohini Devasher

PERMUTATION

Fossus (2011), the opening installation in Rohini Devasher's debut solo exhibition in New Delhi, appears at first glance to resemble the film of a cerebral CT scan, albeit grossly hypertrophied. The dramatic tableau consists of a large, brain-shaped, sandstone cut-out against a black background, with kaleidoscopic visuals projected on its surface. As the imagery shown onto the brain-like relief begins to morph, the once familiar organ takes on the appearance of a honeycombed warren, replete with pulsating bee-, egg- and pod-like structures. It is with this introductory work that the various connotations associated with the exhibition's title, "Permutation"—a substitution or complete change in character or condition—begin to surface.

But despite the apparent menace of this visual, the works in "Permutation" are neither frightening in the science fiction mould, as Devasher's oeuvre has often been, nor reminiscent of real, mutated scientific samples. Rather, the organic-looking specimens in this exhibition have been completely invented—yet rendered with a degree of authenticity—to pursue an intriguing in-between state of realism. Are the markings that resemble residue in the photographs of the digital print and video series "Arboreal" (2011) recalling the bare branches of a tree, or empty capillaries of a blood vessel? Are the intricately penciled-in details overlaying the pastel-colored print *Colony* (2011) meant to look like bulging eyes of larvae-like organisms, or multiplying nuclei of human cells? These works evoke a degree of ambiguity

and wonder by toying with our presumptions of nature's prototypes and evolutionary processes.

These visuals are compelling in themselves thanks to their elements of fantasy informed by scientific fact, but it is the process by which Devasher arrives at them that gives her work a deeper dimension. *Bloodlines* (2009–10), the highlight of the show, is a digital print juxtaposed with a single-channel video-installation. The video element shows black-and-white images of creatures resembling starfish, spiky coral and centipedes that have been self-generated using an evolving video feedback loop (a process in which a video camera faces a TV monitor displaying a live feed from itself). Devasher manipulates the seed image to conjure eerily familiar organic beings and cellular structures, splicing them together hundreds of times to create a spectrum of "parent" and "offspring" images. The print component of *Bloodlines* shows the most varied or evolved offspring, connected to their parents via thin, hand-drawn filaments.

Created in a similar way is the two-channel video *Doppelganger* (2011), which depicts the skeletal frames of what appear to be two dragonflies, with the first insect seemingly "growing" green cross-hatched eggs underneath its wings and the second appearing and disappearing from the frame, revealing a neon blue and greenish-tinged background behind it as it does so. The second dragonfly produces a static optical effect similar to that created by an un-tuned, analog television set. Imagery extrapolated from video-feedback is the primary source for Devasher's entire show, from which she creates digital prints such as the series "Arboreal," consisting of video stills layered with intricately detailed draftsmanship.

With "Permutation," Devasher effectively produced a novel visual language that, through its process and resulting aesthetic, connects the animate world to the inanimate. In *Doppelganger* the natural world appears almost fused with the cyber, and in *Bloodlines* the cyber world seems to generate imagery resembling nature. It becomes clear that Devasher's digitally manipulated artworks point toward a truth: that at a micro-cellular level, all living things are made up of surprisingly similar structures. Through an almost artificially propelled evolution within a digital universe, Devasher shows us that the cyber-world has the potential to humanize us, by allowing for a meaningful understanding of our own world by studying the workings of another.

JYOTI DHAR

