

C. K. RAJAN

MAD FURNITURES AND
PSYCHIC OBJECTS
PART I

THE COMET:

So, how do you see the future of India?

SUN IN THE CONSTELLATION OF PEGASUS:

It will be a slum version of *America!*

C. K. Rajan, March 2010



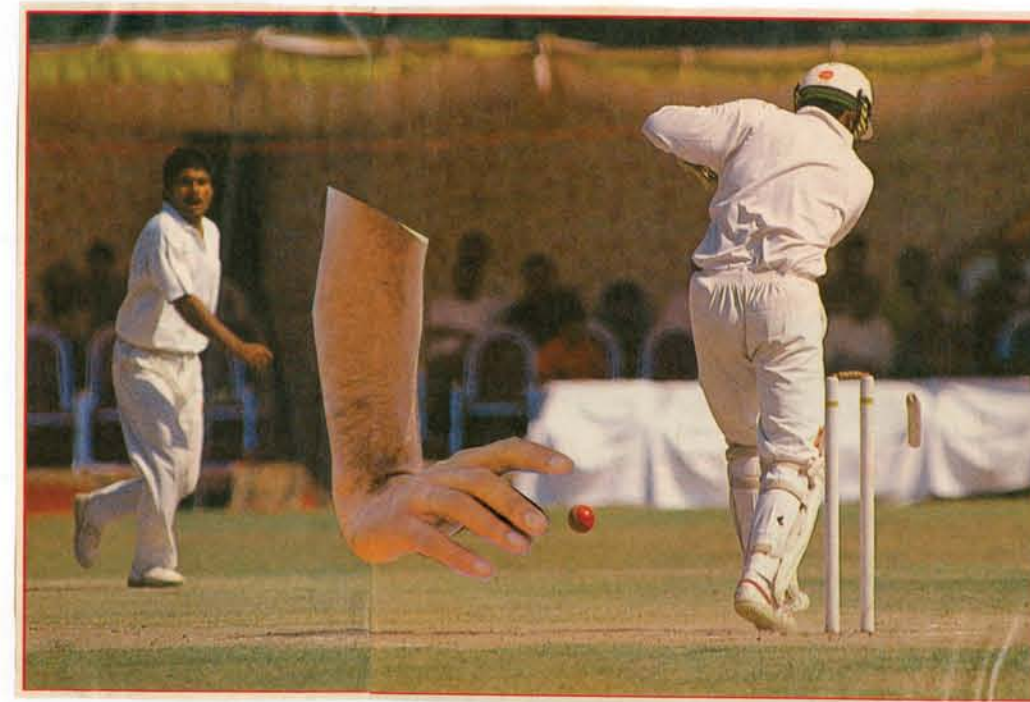
Unemployed Axe, 2010, wood and iron, 48.5 cm/ 19 inches (diameter)

The blade of an axe head painted red with a yellow line along its tip mounted in a green handle. But the handle refuses to remain straight as an axe handle should, and instead spirals uncontrollably, looping around the blade and finishing off in an oval that gives it the appearance of a hieroglyphic snake. An old fashioned ceiling mounted fan slung low, its blades extending into alarming protuberances like swords. A sickle laid flat on the ground its blade painted red and its handle blue, a circular wooden counter placed at the base transforming the whole ensemble into a question mark. Along with an outsized metal ladle with kinks in its tail, a zigzagging pick axe and a bendy shovel, these are some of the works in C.K. Rajan's current exhibition, works which present everyday tools and household appliances, repositioned, remodelled and in various

other different ways estranged from themselves. As sculptural propositions, they are not immediately locatable within the artist's oeuvre, or for that matter in relation to the work of his peers, and while the artist says that they come without any specific references, as the viewer we feel compelled to place them.

Rajan's collage works made between 1991 and 1996, use the distortion of scale and the displacement of people and objects cut and paste from photographic images to produce small intricate formal compositions, which also contain a polemic about contemporary society. Similarly his still lives, painted with inks on paper from 1991 situate everyday objects in unlikely relationships with one another, and in keeping within a particular tradition of still life work metaphorically; the individual elements in the composition including

C. K. Rajan, collage, 1991-96, 12.5 x 18.5 cm





C. K. Rajan, *Survivors*, 1991, Drawing ink on paper, 57 x 89 cm

knives, bottles and fruit are held in a tension, which invoke perhaps violence inherent in the everyday. According to the artist these inks were made by first producing a mock up from which he could paint which acted as a guide while still allowing him the freedom to easily adapt the scale and composition of the objects depicted. With this current step into 3D, things which might have appeared in one of his still life paintings have been given a life of their own, and do the work of estrangement with their own distortions in shape, size, colour and schematic arrangement.

But what kind of objects are these and how should we view them? Most immediately they register as visual gags, a form of punning that elaborates on the comic potential of things to mutate in our imagination in the way animated cartoons conjure to life inanimate

objects and give them intelligence and mobility, so that the kitchen or the wood shed become the scene of elaborately choreographed routines in which knife, fork and spoon or hammer and nails get up and dance about with one another. But while these works contain humour, presumably they are not there simply to entertain. One could consider for example the fact that the artist has chosen to make sculptures based on tools, suggesting a social reading for them as the implements used by workers under certain conditions, so that they come to have class associations, related to subsistence agriculture or construction. Or think of their slightly archaic character as tools of the sort used prior to industrialisation, and now used alongside mechanised processes within particular economies. Then as works of art we can tune into their sensibility,

and look at them as compositions in colour and form. With their simple colour coding, at times they give the impression of having been released from a painting - I am thinking in particular of the shovel which is a curved line of blue with mauve element at one end, or the axe, a daub of muted primaries, or the stylish magenta zigzag of the pick axe handle. Deliberately clumsy, and simplified, they remind me of the 'objects' in Philip Guston's paintings, which are often executed with the use of a single coloured block to give them shape and cartoon lines to add detail. In an untitled work from 1971, Guston arranges a series of unspecified objects within the picture frame – they have weight, dimension and the presence of sculptural propositions placed within an empty ground but it is unclear what they are or why they are there beyond their compositional

value, although we know from Guston's work in general that there is a political consciousness at play. One can imagine Rajan's current sculptures when placed in the gallery, laid out perhaps on a floor of polished concrete, also assuming the character of individual elements in a colourful painterly composition – being form without function. They might stretch and contort and change themselves into curious and pleasing compositions with the precociousness of everyday objects that wish to become art. Hannah Arendt talks about the uselessness of art objects, and how they have necessarily been “removed from the everyday world of use-objects because they are ‘good’ for nothing.”ⁱ She does this in the context of collecting, a process in which many previously useful things (stamps, toothpicks, coins) lose their function, a

practice enjoyed by the rich, who can afford to accumulate useless items, and children for whom “things are not yet commodities and are not valued according to their usefulness.”ⁱⁱ In an unusual twist, she paints the collector as a revolutionary figure, because, quoting Benjamin, he “dreams his way not only into a remote and bygone world, but at the same time into a better one in which, to be sure, people are not provided with what they need any more than they are in the everyday world, but in which things are liberated from the drudgery of their usefulness.”ⁱⁱⁱ In this sense perhaps we could consider this particular artistic gesture by C. K. Rajan as a laying down of tools, or similarly, the production of tools which are on strike because they wish to become art.

Grant Watson, London, September 2010

i Hannah Arendt, Introduction to Illuminations by Walter Benjamin, Fontana, 1973, p 42

ii Ibid

iii Ibid, quoting Walter Benjamin, Schriften 1916

Ageing Question, 2010, wood and iron, 36.5 x 16.5 cm / 14.3 x 6.4 inches



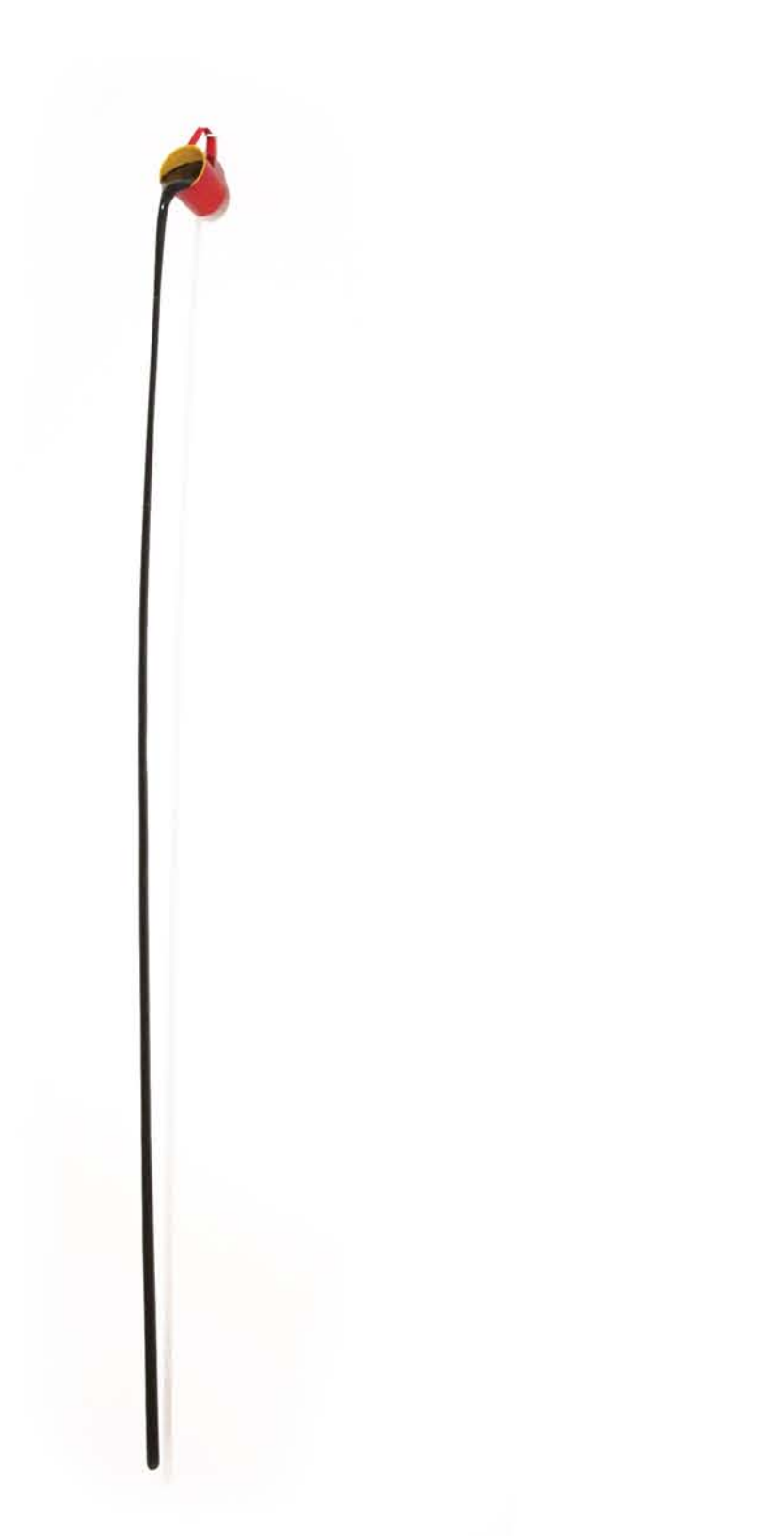


Psychopathic Killer Fan, 2010, wood and iron, 390 x 257 cm / 153.5 x 101 inches

Corporate Pickaxe, 2010, wood and iron, 46.5 x 100 cm / 18.3 x 39.3 inches



Absent Minded Cup, 2010, wood and iron, 232.5 x 8.5 cm / 91.5 x 3.3 inches



Restless Iron Box, 2010, wood and iron, 21.5 x 22.5 cm / 8.4 x 8.8 inches



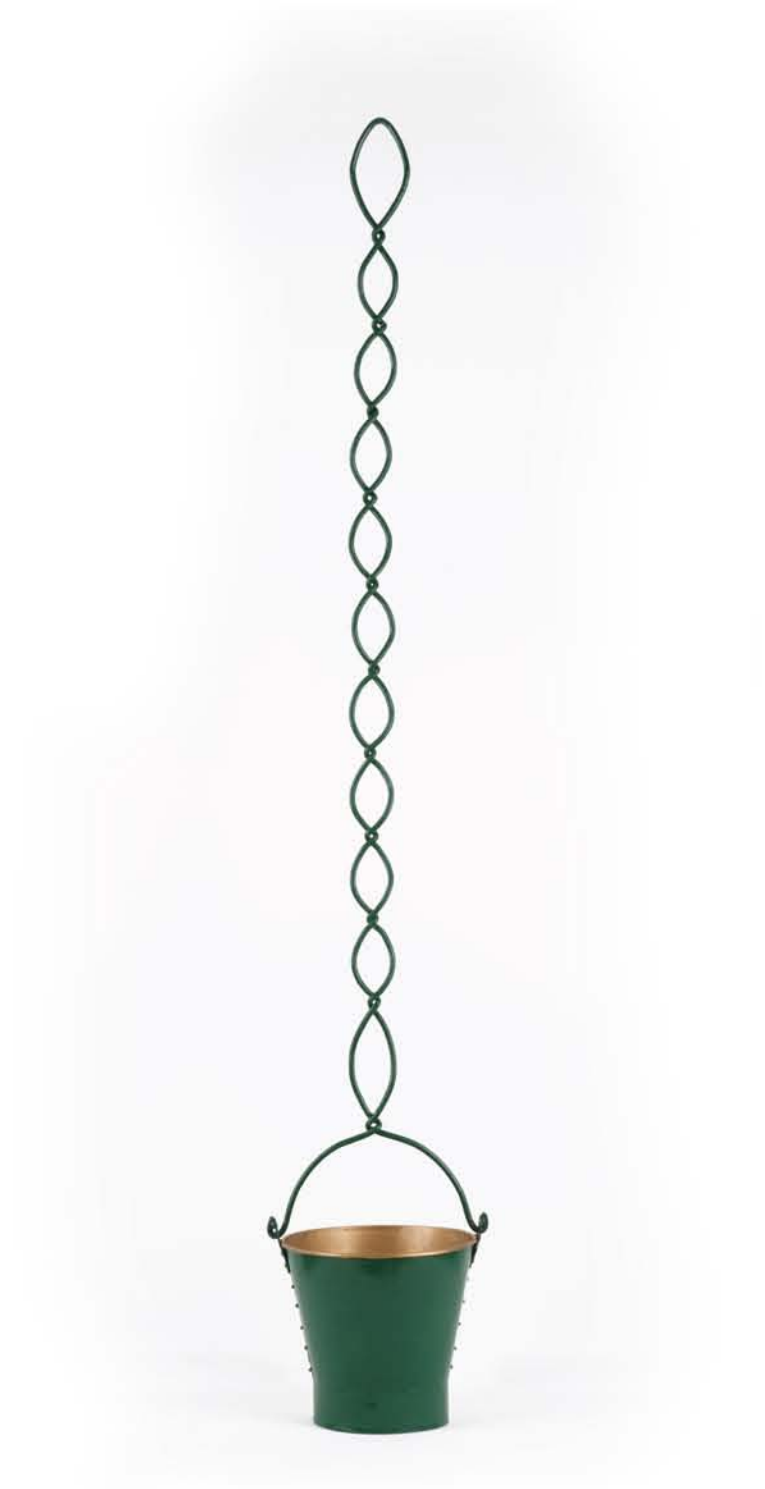
Seeking Ladle, 2010, wood and iron, 71 x 11.1 cm / 27.9 x 4.3 inches



Golden Broom, 2010, gold paint on broom , 7 x 100 cm / 2.7 x 39.3 inches



Newly Wed Bucket, 2010, iron, 142 x 24.4 cm / 55.9 x 9.6 inches



Obsessive Compulsive Disordered Garden Cutter, 2010, wood and iron, 46 x 15 cm / 18.1 x 5.9 inches



Guest Faculty from Third Reich, 2010, wood and iron, 27.1 x 126 cm / 10.6 x 49.6 inches



Stalker Knife, 2010, wood and iron, 59.5 x 206 cm / 23.4 x 81.1 inches



Introvert Spade, 2010, wood and iron, 94 x 26.5 cm / 37 x 10.4 inches



'Twilight Zone', 2010, wood and iron, 32.5 x 11.5 cm / 12.7 x 4.5 inches



Silent Assassin, 2010, Wrist watch and rexine, 416.5 x 3.5 cm / 163.9 x 1.3 inches



'Enfant Terrible', 2010, wood and iron, 30 x 16 cm / 11.8 x 6.2 inches



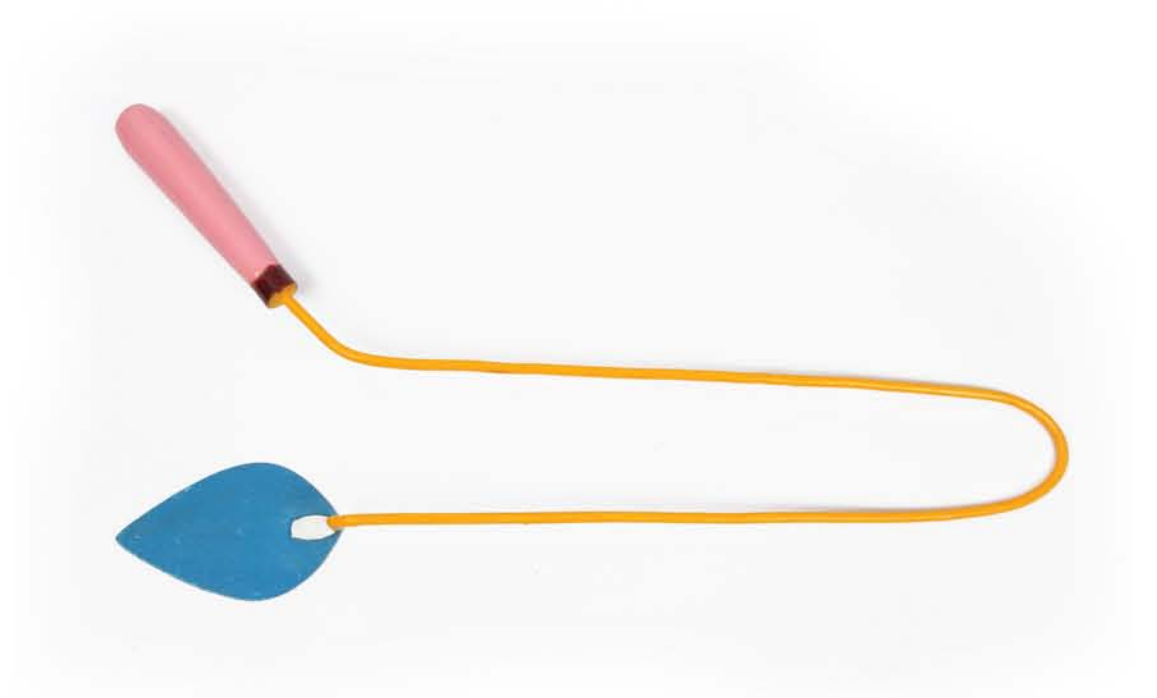


Time Running Out, 2010, wood and iron, 78.5 x 205 cm / 30.9 x 80.7 inches

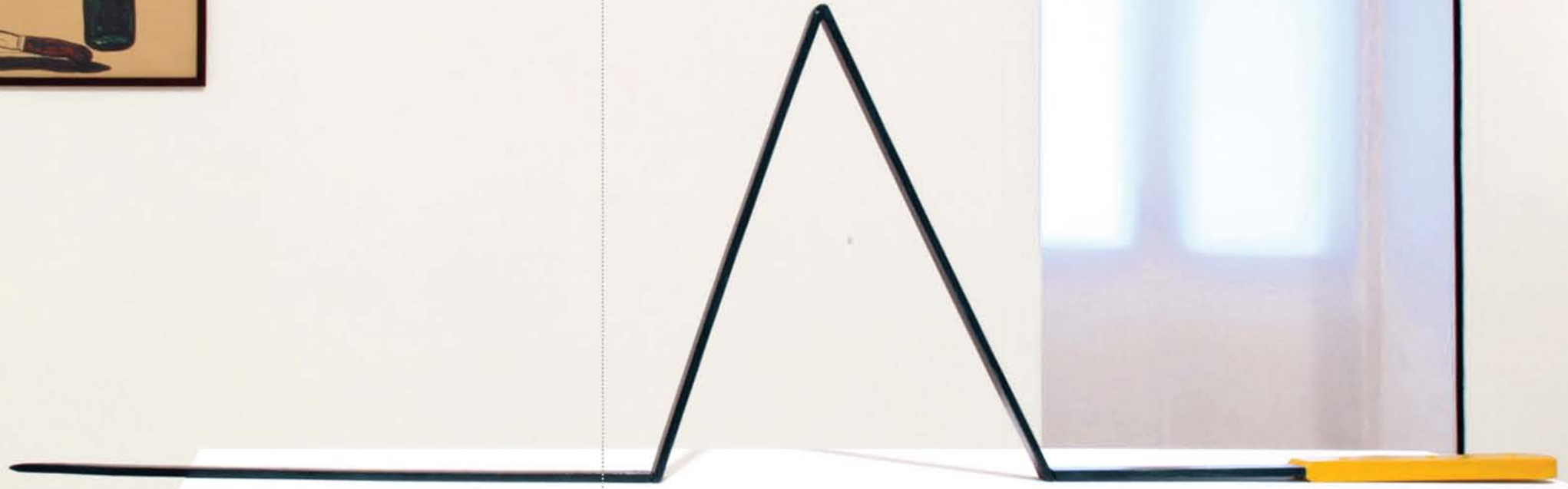
Cosmetic Scalpel, 2010, wood and iron, 42.5 x 7 cm / 16.7 x 2.7 inches



'Urban Blues', 2010, wood and iron, 30 x 58 cm / 11.8 x 22.8 inches







C.K. Rajan studied Painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, M.S. University Baroda, and later attained an M.A. in Painting at the S.N. School of Art, Central University of Hyderabad. In 2007 his collages were shown alongside those of Kerry James Marshall at documenta 12 in Kassel, and subsequently in the exhibitions Santhal Family at MuHKA, Antwerp (2008), Art of Modern India at IVAM, Valencia (2009) and Have I Ever Opposed You? at Gallery Faye Fleming & Partner, Geneva (2010).

Born 1960 in Kerala, C.K. Rajan lives in Hyderabad.



Anita Dube and C. K. Rajan



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PHOTOGRAPHY
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