



## INTRODUCTION

HENA KAPADIA | FOUNDER-DIRECTOR, TARQ

BOMBAY, APRIL 2014

“One day it will all come out” by Baroda based Soghra Khurasani is the artist’s first solo show. The show looks into her complex practice, which revolves around her visceral reaction to the political and religious realities of being a Muslim in India today. She keeps returning to the imagery of blood cells in her work, and thus systematically blurs the lines between powerful emotions and biological reality.

The display includes several forms of printmaking as well as new media work, through which the artist is able to explore and express ideas of beauty and violence, using an incredible attention to detail. Her print works include the use of the woodcut, etching and serigraphy techniques. We are delighted to be able to display some of Soghra’s wood blocks, from which she has made the prints on display, as these are artworks in their own right, and are essential to understanding the artist’s process.

The body of work is accompanied by this catalogue published in collaboration with the Clark House Initiative, featuring an essay by Sumesh Sharma, who has been closely involved with Soghra’s practice.

ONE DAY  
IT WILL  
COME  
OUT!

CLARK HOUSE INPRINT

## UNDIMINISHED VOICES

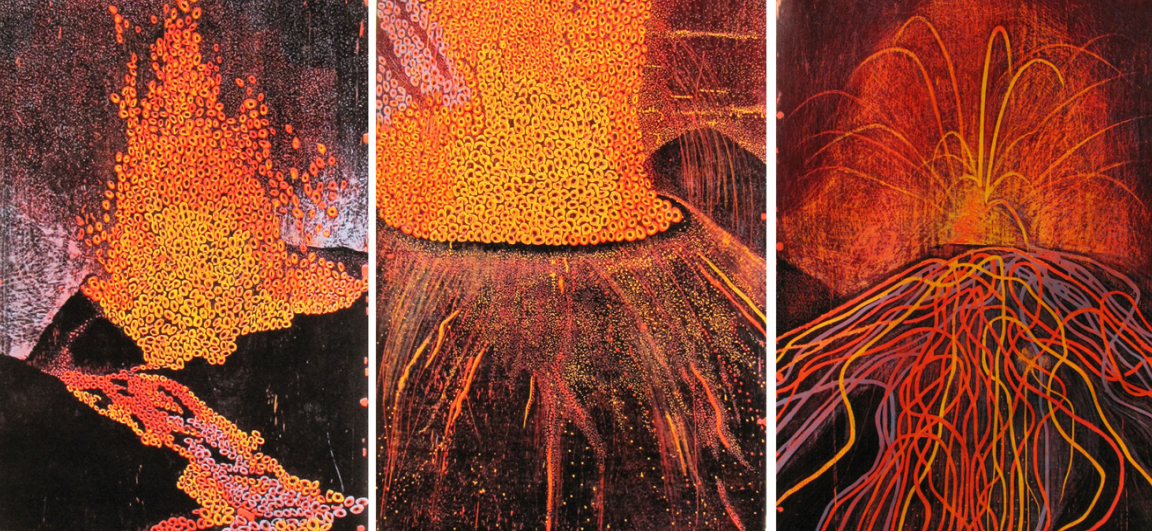
SUMESH SHARMA | CLARK HOUSE INITIATIVE

CHANDRAPUR, VIDARBHA, APRIL 2014.

Unknowingly, in its path of destruction a volcano does act as an agent of preservation, one that encourages a time lapse, creating materials, objects and sites for archaeology, museums and exhibition displays. One such exhibition last winter brought to the city of Munich intricate pieces of jewelry, ceramic, rooms made in mosaic, silverware and paraphernalia that had been preserved under layers of volcanic ashes and lava after the great eruption of the Vesuvius. The lava encrusted fallen humans into sculpted memories of a classical age, enabling an audience in 2013 to imagine a life from a period several centuries ago, as evidence is often lost to humidity, war and inevitably change. Death caused by these eruptions ends the natural progression of the lives of its victims. But an economy erupts centuries later, propped by the financial reverberations of archaeological activities, research, museums and tourists. We are unsure of the sympathies of the tourists to these lives, and this phenomenon can often occur even in a matter of decades. Numerous cities and towns around Europe are home to museums that are memories of forced de-populations these places suffered in 1930's ending with World War II.

Anne Franks' house in Amsterdam, Museums in erstwhile Jewish Ghettoes in European cities that had their Jewry depopulated by Nazi occupation, Holocaust memorials, all document an ending - forced by a cruel political ideology. Across these cities Synagogues differed in architecture, Jewish reformist movements took on elements from protestant ethics, the cuisines of the Jewish communities re-



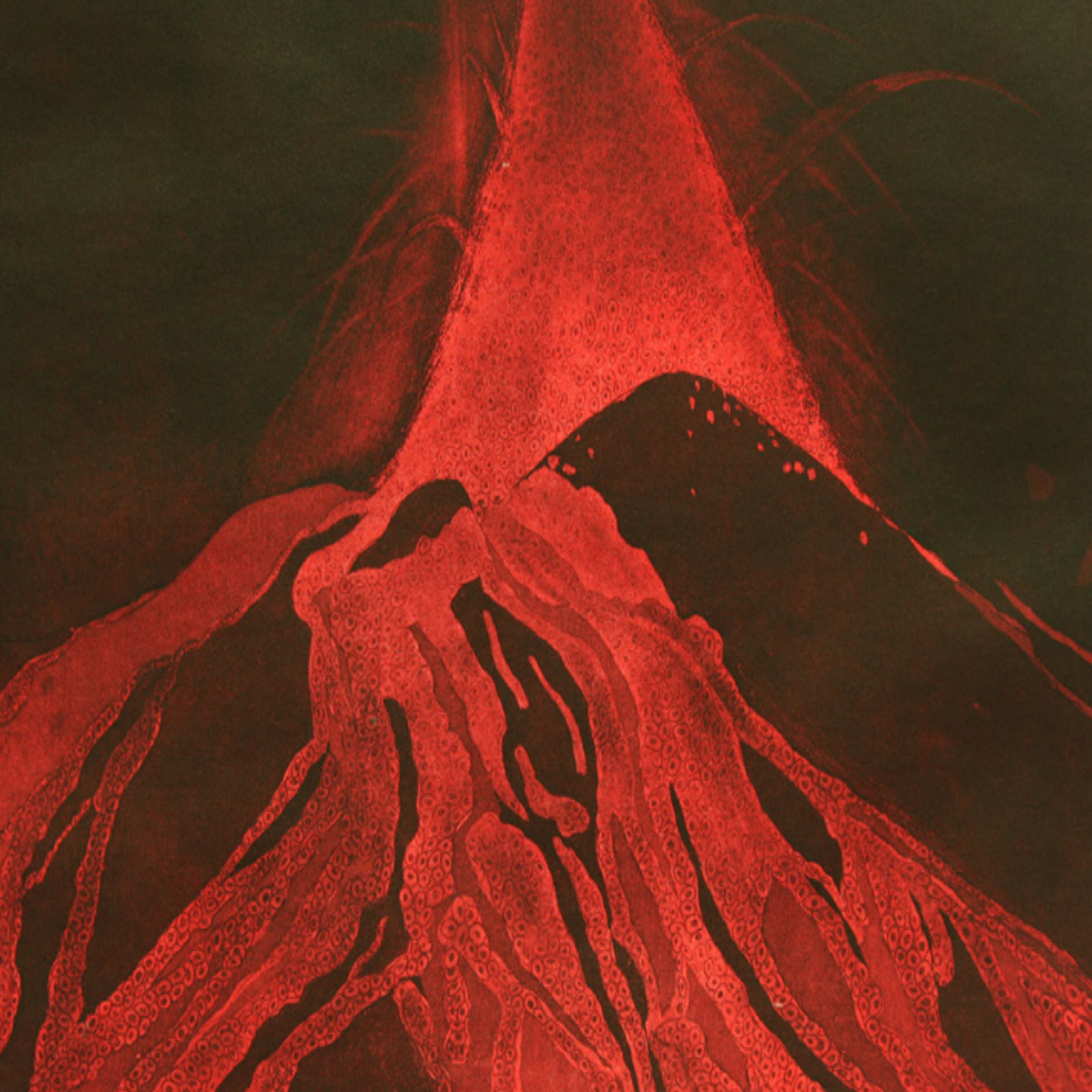


flected their assimilation to the land, but that did not deter their destruction in a matter of a decade, which erased centuries of their collective adherence to notions of geographical and cultural belonging to the nation state. Europe soon shifted its collective guilt of genocide, outsourced it to the Levantine, leaving the Palestinians to deal with an occupation and interpretations of history. A similar guilt is being assigned to assumptions of economic development in contemporary India.

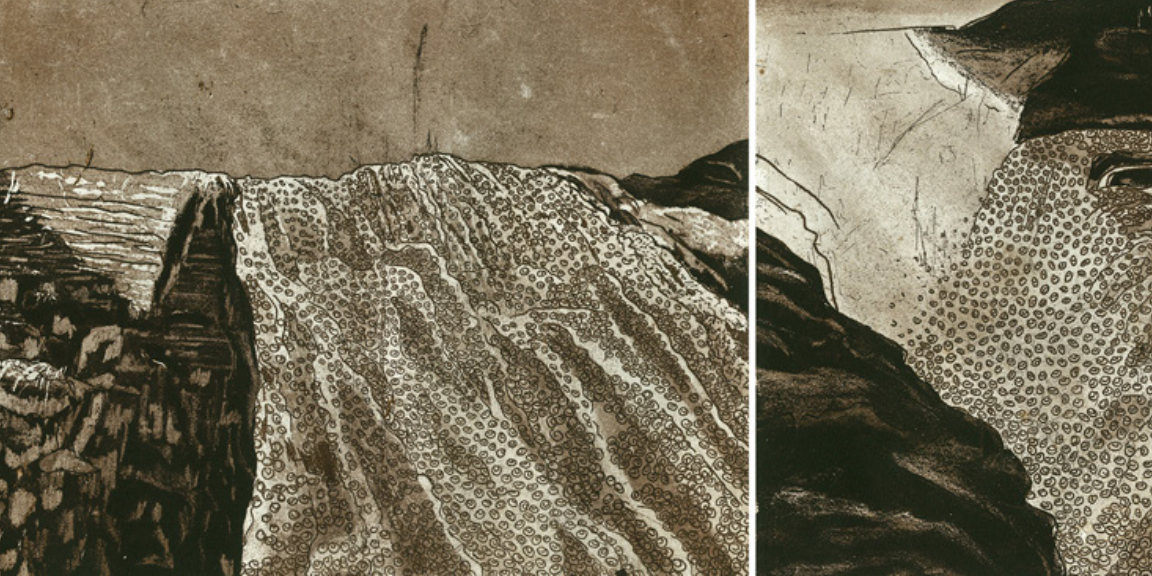
Soghra Khurasani, graduated in 2010 with a degree in printmaking from the Maharaja Sayajirao University in the city of Baroda. Baroda is a city in the western Indian state of Gujarat and once was capital of the erstwhile Maratha confederate princely state of Baroda. A British vassal the King Maharaja Sayajirao, was a pro-

gressive mind, he established an independent postal service, civil service, the university and vast libraries. Most importantly he abolished the limitations put upon his subjects by the caste system, opening up education to the lesser privileged especially the Dalits, or those termed untouchable by the four-tiered Indian Caste or Varna system. He was the benefactor to Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar who came back to serve as bureaucrat in his state. Ambedkar rose to become India's first law minister and the architect to a constitution that established a secular state, one that promised citizenship bereft of discrimination based on one's faith or caste. But by the 1980s the basic ideological markers of the Indian republic were being questioned, a failing economy and the excesses of the emergency were turning people away from their so called belief in secular socialist non-aligned ideals. The political right rose with a consolidation of the saffron vote, the tremors of that period still manifest in the movement of political tectonic plates erupting as Volcanoes manifesting in the Gujarat Riots of 2002.

Khurasani, born to a family that had migrated from Khorasan in Persia to Vishakhapatnam on the East Coast of India was no stranger to conflict. Sectarian conflicts that emerged with the succession of the caliphate leading to the martyrdom of Ali and Hussain had divided Muslims as Shias and Sunnis. Sectarian identities led to the establishment of two prominent distinct visual codes based on architecture, calligraphy and in the case of the Shias – miniature painting. The Mughal Empire looked upon our Persian neighbours not as co-religionists, the Mughals were Sunnis, but imported architectural formats for mosques, invited Persian miniature painters to their court and introduced Persian as the court language. These traditions were acclimatized and spread across India, much like the influence of Sufism to reform movements in Hinduism. A known Sufi, Wali Gujarati, migrated from Aurangabad, to Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujarat rendering Ghazals from Persian to Urdu







and Gujarati in the 17th century, establishing the present use of local lingua in ghazals. He once wrote about his love for Gujarat and his wish to die in its placid temperate environs, which he did, but in 2002 his tomb was razed by a mob, and then road-rolled and metaled by a road. Khurasani came to study in a state already scarred by an unfortunate history of violence.

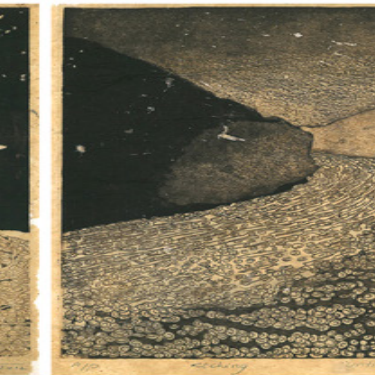
Makhanlal Chaturvedi in his poem, 'Pushp ki Abhilasha' or 'The Ambition of a Flower', an ode to India's freedom fighters, writes that a flower prefers to not adorn the hair of young girl nor does it want to be left at the feet of a statue in a temple,





but rather laid onto the path on which freedom fighters pass through, those who sacrifice their lives for the cause of Independence, the elimination of social evil, inequality and exploitation. During the visit of any foreign head of state to India, their visit to Mahatma Gandhi's memorial at Rajghat, is a must. Here the visiting dignitary places a large round wreath on the spot where the Mahatma was laid to rest after being assassinated by the Hindu Right. During our election season here in India sycophants adorn politicians with garlands of various sizes, even ones that contain stapled notes. Garlands are still offered in temples and are used in rituals during marriages where games are played to establish the dominance of one





of the partners. Thus power games replace the Makhanlal's proposed suggestion for flowers. The rose in particular has been long associated with India's secular socialist and non-aligned past. Jawaharlal Nehru used all had a red rose buttoned onto his long 'Nehru Coat'. Mughal emperors devised irrigation techniques and landscape formats for their vast rose gardens, the presidential palace in Delhi has a large rose plantation and the rose in in recent times has been infamously associated with 'Valentines Day' - a practice violently opposed by the conservative right wing across India. But Soghra creates a large circular garland or red etched roses, and another where she uses red cloth and wire mesh. Her 'Garland Tribute' honours the anonymous victims who heroically fought against the follies of people. The count is long and is still on, it includes those who lost their lives in a series of pogroms that have polarized us, women who have suffered the indignity of rape and violence, and many others who have been abandoned by the state.

Khurasani is delicate, fine features shape her face, her eyes suggest her descent from Iran, she resembles the damsels featured in Abul Rehman Chughtai's paintings in the National Gallery of Modern Art, they illustrate Persian couplets. Aware of how personal beauty is discounted as naïve, unserious and expectedly weak in a misogynist society, she carved a triptych woodcut of throbbing hearts calling them 'Braveheart'. Kathe Kollwitz's portraits throughout her life were of herself, Khurasani's self portraits manifest in these hearts, they narrate her deep conviction and ability to arrest the social exploitation of women despite her appearance. In 2009 the year she published this series of prints, little had she known of the events of December 2012 in Delhi. A young woman was raped and then mutilated by a gang of inebriated men on a bus. She was later abandoned and despite all efforts succumbed to her energies. Under Indian laws the identity of a rape victim cannot



be revealed, she was christened by the media as Delhi's brave-heart or 'Nirbhaya'.

Rapes that had often gone unreported now ushered by certain awareness and softening of an uncaring police and judicial system began to be uncovered across India. The 'Delhi Rape' did not deter others but led to a series of similar incidents across India even Bombay. Tough 'anti-rape laws' are being enacted but again not safeguarding other forms of rape that both women and men suffer within their own homes, or at hands of their own sex. But the spurt of rapes uncovered a systematic de-humanization of the female body; successive Bollywood movies had celebrated rape as a convenient detour to escape censorship laws and pre-conceived conservative morals where onscreen sex or affection was discouraged. When MTV and Hollywood began to compete with the Indian industry at its doorstep after liberalization they began shedding their prudish cloaks, but instead adopted a perverse aesthetic of objectification of the female body. Scripts favoured misogynist interpretations of culture and tradition while dealing with relations with women! Stereotypical roles were doled out and the perceptions of beauty were altered to create a market for fairness creams and beauty products. An increased dependence on consumerist aspiration even in love and sex in a society plagued with increasing inequity was an appropriate catalyst for the eruption in the spate of violence against women. The religious right began advocating archaic moral codes or invented new ones that ruled against jeans to sitting in parks, while they continued to receive patronage from the merchants of sleaze - Bollywood Actors, who often contested various national and local elections to wrest seats on their behalf. Though the 'Right' also sat in demonstrations to advocate for tough laws against rape they suffered from selective amnesia as they were going slow or not acting upon the perpetrators of rape during the riots of Gujarat.

Of the 51 Shakti Peethas, one, which is nestled on the Himalayas, is 'Jwala Devi' or the 'Flame Goddess'. When her father refused to marry her to Lord Shiva and disrespected Shiva at a feast he had organized, Sati immolated herself in the ceremonial fire. Shiva enraged danced his 'Tandava Ras' dispersing Sati's body across India, and each spot where it fell, it became a 'Shakthi Peetha'. This story led to the founding of the 'Shakti cult' one where the Goddess was venerated, but also the cause of social evils such 'Widow burning' also referred to as Sati. Since then the flame and the volcano are seen as representations of the 'Devi' or Goddess on earth. In Bali's traditional sacrifices are offered at the mouth of the volcano. Its eruptions is seen as a retribution of our sins against humanity and the refusal of mother earth. Its energy and lava is admired and seen as a term of strength. Khurasani created a series of large and small woodcuts in 2013, just a month after the December rape, all her woodcuts depicted a volcano. She explains them as emotional outbursts, a pent up frustration of her disappointment with people, her rejection of the years of violence she had witnessed for the last two decades, where the victims were primarily women.

Since their introduction woodcuts have been a medium of propaganda in India. The artist Mehli Gobhai once mentioned that he learned to make woodcuts because he would find the medium with ease even in a forest. Woodcuts were introduced to India, primarily through illustrations used in bibles by missionaries who distributed them with missionary zeal and soon began publishing and printing bibles in native tongues. But by the late 19th century they were adopted by all kinds of religious publishing specifically Hindu publishers who had to represent a vast pantheon of deities. At Santiniketan where woodcut printing became most popular producing exponents such as Nandlal Bose and Chittaprosod, the method

had been derived from Japanese woodcut printing methods. It arrived as a part of Tagore's own inclination towards the east where he tried to find an alternative to the west, favoring Japanese wash techniques rather than Western Schools of Painting. Krishna Reddy the exponent of Multi-Coloured viscosity though trained as a sculptor under Nandlal Bose, made his first prints in Santiniketan and they were woodcuts. Reddy saw printmaking a sculptural practice, as it dealt with a great deal of carving, which he enjoyed. Reddy had fled to Santiniketan because of his association with the Quit Indian movement and he feared jail. One of his early woodcuts depicted those struck by the Bengal famine. Long slender creatures that would then be found throughout his prints whenever he depicted humans – depicting them almost each time as political subjects. But using woodcuts for a social cause was Chittaprosod, he travelled around Bengal and throughout India working for Communist Party mouthpieces or left oriented magazines documenting poverty, famines, the tyranny of the landlords and most importantly the travesties of the partitions. He often rendered them with texts animating them as propaganda posters. Somnath Hore another proponent of printmaking from Santiniketan made a series of etchings where he depicted Goddess Durga, lamenting on the poverty of Bengal, the Bangladesh War, its refugee crisis and the emergency. Khurasani somewhere returns to a strong tradition of social discourse through woodcuts though her works are less literal and accompany dichotomies such as those of life and death simultaneously.

The colour red, is often associated with danger, but it is most sensual of all colours, representing across societies associations with women. Red in India is seen as a symbol of fertility, religiosity, marriage and luck. In China it is often associated with luck but more recently throughout the world with communism. No wonder

Mao's Cultural Revolution was spread through the use of red and black woodcuts. They glorified Mao, comparing him to the Rising Red Sun, to sunflowers, and China under him as bastion of Red. Woodcuts were perhaps most produced under Mao's regime, the most popular format of state propaganda. Khurasani's red represents exuberance, a spout, a flow and a relentless energy, that is feminine and unrepressed.

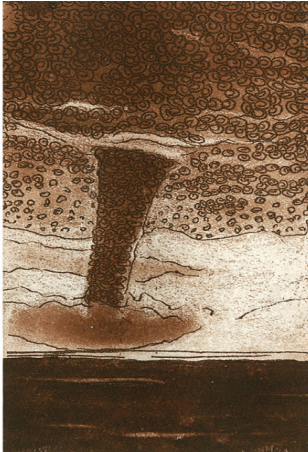
Her works represents a predominant energy that is seen throughout our nation amongst people frustrated by graft and corruption and the inefficiency of the state. This energy spouts undirected waiting to be channeled by political forces that differ in opinion and ideology. Thus through her print 'Lost in a Valley' where she fills a landscape with bloodied roses and blood cells aside each other, she warns us of these energies being lost in vain. Lost to Fascism. She echoes the voices of the millions of women across valleys in India who are exploited by laws that deny them their fundamental rights and sanctifies acts of violence and rape against them, alienating the state from its citizens.

In a set of recent untitled etchings she depicts shifting tectonic plates and lava moving chunks of land, creating divisions, new realities and changing the geography. Zarina Hashmi in her etchings often revisited her traumas from the partition; she illustrates personal letters onto the copper plate and draws the line that now divides the subcontinent. Khurasani warns us of the invisible divisions our society has begun to create, constantly finding new minorities as they replace the ones already subjugated. But her works revel in the courage of her fellow women, their ability to resist the onslaught, like Chittaprosod she illustrates and encourages a revolution against misogyny. Kathe Kolwitz drew for years the poor



people, among whom her husband worked; she claimed she was entirely bored by the middle class bourgeoisie, for they lacked courage of the working classes. Documenting two major wars, where Kolwitz lost her family to the battlefield, she drew against their occurrence, lamenting their need and thus inviting the ire of the Nazis. Had we heeded to her calls Gulberg Society would never have been India's contemporary Pompeii. In his 36 views of Mount Fuji, woodcut prints by Katsushika Hokusai, the 18 century Japanese artist, emerged from the volcano becoming evident in daily life as Tokyo came to be Japan's capital city and people began to travel into the city, and began living with the view of the sacred mount. Soghra Khurasani, makes the volcano, a metaphor to her voice, much more evident in our lives, in a precarious period of political change where voices such as hers are ignored but are the ones that need immediate hearing.





Soghra Khurasani (b. 1983) is an artist based out of Baroda, though she was raised in the city of Vishakhapatnam on India's South-Eastern Coast. Concerned with the representation of women in visual culture and a gradual loss of voice of socially threatened minorities in India, Khurasani uses printmaking; sight specific installations that use cloth and wire mesh, and using the colour red, to voice her opinion. Her works are subtle, layered with art historical and social references that she narrates informed by her own tribulations with the world, through the use of visual metaphors that are appropriated to her feminist discourse. She graduated with a post-graduate degree in printmaking from Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda, 2010 and with an undergraduate degree in painting in 2008 from the Andhra University. She was part of 'Multiple Encounters' AIFACS New Delhi, Visual Evidence, Clark House Bombay, and 'Interstices' a collateral project of the Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2012- 2013. She was a residency at Religare Arts in 2011 and has been part of Lalit Kala Akademi national print making camps.





One day it will come out  
Woodcut on paper  
Numbered 1 in an edition of 3  
56" x 108"  
2012

One day it will come out  
Woodblocks  
Unique Work  
56" x 108"  
2012

Red Eruption  
Etching on paper  
Artist's Proof  
15" x 20"  
2012

One day it will come out 2  
Etching on paper  
Numbered 1 in an edition of 10  
36" x 33"  
2012

Untitled  
Etching on paper  
Numbered 1 in an edition of 10

8" x 29"  
2013

How much you give and how much you take  
Interactive installation in serigraphy, wood and thread  
Size variable  
2014

Silent Fields  
Woodcut on paper  
Numbered 1 in an edition of 3  
44" x 58"  
2014

Silent Fields  
Woodcut on paper  
Numbered 1 in an edition of 3  
41" x 58"  
2014

Lost in Valley  
Woodcut on paper  
Numbered 1 in an edition of 3  
38" x 58"  
2014

Braveheart  
Woodcut on paper  
Numbered 3 in an edition of 3  
67.2" x 139.2"  
2009

Untitled  
Etching on paper  
Numbered 1 in an edition of 10  
6.5" x 10.5"  
2013

Garland Tribute  
Cloth and mesh installation  
Unique work  
48" x 48" x 36"  
2012

Garland Tribute  
Woodcut on paper  
Artist Proof  
44" x 44"  
2012

'ONE DAY IT WILL COME OUT' IS A PUBLICATION BY CLARK HOUSE INPRINT BROUGHT OUT ON THE EVENT OF SOGHRA KHURASANI'S DEBUT SOLO WHICH IS A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT OF CLARK HOUSE INITIATIVE AND TARQ CURATED BY HENA KAPADIA AND SUMESH SHARMA.

TARQ

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CLARK HOUSE INPRINT IS WHERE WE PUBLISH NOTES THAT ARE ALTERNATE, DISCUSS FREEDOM, ART HISTORY, AND THE AESTHETICS OF DISSENT. TARQ: SANSKRIT FOR "DISCUSSION, ABSTRACT REASONING, LOGIC AND CAUSE", IS A CONTEMPORARY ART GALLERY IN MUMBAI DEDICATED TO GROWING A CONVERSATION AROUND ART. CLARK HOUSE INITIATIVE BOMBAY IS A CURATORIAL COLLABORATIVE CONCERNED WITH IDEAS OF FREEDOM. SUMESH SHARMA (1983) IS A CURATOR INFORMED BY ALTERNATE ART HISTORIES THAT OFTEN INCLUDE CULTURAL PERSPEC-

TIVES INFORMED BY SOCIO-ECONOMICS AND POLITICS. IMMIGRANT CULTURE IN THE FRANCOPHONE, VERNACULAR EQUALITIES, MOVEMENTS OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS IN CULTURE ARE HIS AREAS OF INTEREST. HE CO-FOUNDED THE CLARK HOUSE INITIATIVE IN 2010. ZASHA COLAH (1982) IS INTERESTED IN CULTURAL SOVEREIGNTY, AND THE WAY ART ADDRESSES INJUSTICE AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS. W: WWW.CLARKHOUSEINITIATIVE.ORG

PRINTED AT KESHAV BHIKAJI DHAWALE PUBLICATIONS, GIRGAUM, BOMBAY - 04

THE PUBLICATION IS LIMITED EDITION ARTIST BOOK OF 500 COPIES.

ISBN 978-93-83804-42-9

TARQ

CLARK HOUSE INITIATIVE INPRINT

EDITION: /500

