

MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

For Immediate Release.

Amar Kanwar: The Torn First Pages, 2004-2008
The Lightning Testimonies, 2007

March 16 – April 24, 2010

Opening reception: Tuesday, March 16th, 6-8 pm

Marian Goodman Gallery is delighted to present the first exhibition in our New York space of the work of Indian artist Amar Kanwar.

The artist will present two multi-channel installations, *The Torn First Pages*, 2004-2008 and *The Lightning Testimonies*, 2007, both of which will have their New York premiere in this exhibition.

Born in 1964 in New Delhi where he lives and works, Kanwar has distinguished himself through films and multi-media works which explore the politics of power, violence, sexuality, and justice. His multi-layered installations originate in narratives often drawn from zones of conflict and are characterized by a distinctly poetic approach to the social and political. In retracing history through images, ritual objects, literature, poetry and song, Kanwar creates lyrical, meditative film essays that do not aim to represent trauma or political situations as much as to find ways through them. Kanwar's work looks deeply into the causes and effects and how they are translated into everyday life and cultural forms.

“Imagine the formal presentation of poetry as evidence in a future war crimes tribunal. Imagine nineteen sheets of paper floating forever in the wind...”
-- Amar Kanwar, on “The Torn First Pages”

The Torn First Pages (2004-2008), a 19-channel film installation in three parts that will be on view in the North Gallery, is presented in honor of the Burmese bookshop owner Ko Than Htay who was imprisoned for ‘tearing out the first page’ of all books and journals he sold and which contained ideological slogans from the Burmese military dictatorship. *The Torn First Pages* is also an ode to the thousands engaged in the struggle for democracy in Burma, following the paths of Burmese activism in exile. The films directly, elliptically and metaphorically encounter resistance and the struggle for a democratic society, contemporary forms of non violence, political exile, memory, and dislocation.

The Torn First Pages, jointly commissioned by TBA21, Vienna and Public Press, New Delhi, was previously exhibited in its completed form at Haus der Kunst, Munich, in the exhibition *A Question of Evidence* at TBA 21, Vienna and as a work in progress at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (in 2008). This is its first presentation in the U.S.

In an interview in 2008, Kanwar says, *‘The Torn First Pages’ is a work consisting of a series of films, some short and silent pieces and others longer in duration. They are all filmed outside of Burma... in India, Europe, and the U.S. The project is conceived to exist as a moving image constellation that tangentially engages with the Burmese resistance and the question of democracy, exile, and individual courage. It intends to draw us into the Burmese resistance no matter where and how far away we are. The films are varied interventions; I wanted to reexamine the question of evidence, the process of collecting evidence, archiving and presentation, its validity and aesthetics with reference to crime and political resistance. I also wanted to intervene in the realm of the image that supposedly belongs to ‘news’— the image that is valuable, is continuously repeated and forgotten. ...’* (interview in *Flash Art: Focus India*, 2008, Vol XLI, No. 258)

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The 8-channel video installation *The Lightning Testimonies* (2007) will be presented in the South Gallery and reflects upon a history of conflict in the Indian subcontinent through experiences of sexual violence. "*The Lightning Testimonies*" creates an experience that emerges from a constellation of eight synchronized choreographed projections with sound tracks that lead to disparate narratives that then converge into a single projection. As the stories unfold, women from different times and regions come forward. The multiple projections speak to them directly, in an effort to understand how such violence is resisted, remembered and recorded by individuals and communities.

In this exploration, multiple stories are revealed, sometimes in people, images and memories, and at other times in objects from nature and everyday life that stand as silent but surviving witnesses. Submerged narratives appear, disappear and are then reborn in other permutations at another time. Using a range of visual vocabularies, *The Lightning Testimonies* transports us beyond the realm of suffering into a space of quiet contemplation, where resilience creates the potential for transformation. The work premiered at *Documenta 12*, Kassel (2007) and was seen in *Reflexions on Contemporary India*, Casa Encendida, Madrid (2008) and *Indian Highways*, Serpentine, London and Astrup Fernley, Oslo (in 2008-2009). This is its first presentation in New York. *Lightning Testimonies* was made with the support of the Ford Foundation, New Delhi; *Documenta 12*, Kassel, Germany; and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna.

Amar Kanwar is the recipient of the 1st Edward Munch Award for Contemporary Art, Norway (2005); an Honorary Doctorate in Fine Arts, Maine College of Art, Portland, ME; the MacArthur Fellowship in India, the Golden Gate Award, San Francisco International Film Festival.

Projects in 2010 include new Artists Cinema commission which will be launched at a special preview evening at Tate Modern on April 16th, 2010; a group exhibition *Being Singular Plural: Moving Images from India*, upcoming at the Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin in June; HEART Herning Museum of Contemporary Art, Herning, Denmark; *Signs of Life*, Kunstmuseum Luzern, Switzerland. His work is included in the current *Contemplating the Void: Interventions in the Museum*, Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Solo exhibitions of Kanwar's work have been seen recently at: Film Huis den Haag, The Hague, Netherlands (2009); Haus der Kunst, Munich; Stedelijk, Amsterdam and Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands; Galerie Marian Goodman, Paris (all 2008); Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (2007); Apeejay Media Gallery, New Delhi (2007); National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo (2006); Fotogalleriet, Oslo (2005); The Renaissance Society, Chicago (2004); and Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm (2003).

A selection of group exhibitions include *Significant and Insignificant Events*, Museum of Modern Art, Istanbul (2009); *What a Wonderful World*, Goteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, Goteborg City Museum (2009); *Indian Highway*, Serpentine Gallery, London and Astrup Fernley Museum, Oslo (2008-2009); Thyssen Bornemisza Art Contemporary, 2008; *The Greenroom: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art (Part 1)*, The Hessel Museum and Centre for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, NY (2008); *Documenta 11 and 12, Kassel, Germany* (2002 and 2007); *Zones of Contact*, Museum for Contemporary Art, Biennale of Sydney (2006), Australia; and *Image War: Contesting Images of Political Conflict*, Whitney Museum of Art, NY (2006).

Please join us at the opening reception on Tuesday, March 16th, from 6 – 8 pm.

For further information, please contact Leslie Nolen at: 212 977 7160.

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