

Vivan Sundaram's exhibition, 'Disjunctures', at Haus der Kunst, Munich

Vivan Sundaram and Okwui Enwezor

Vivan Sundaram's exhibition, titled 'Disjunctures', curated by Deepak Ananth, opened at Haus der Kunst, Munich on 28 June 2018 and continued till 1 January 2019. Occupying the vast North Galleries of Haus der Kunst, the exhibition showed the artist's work over almost five decades, including paintings from 1968 to room-size installations in 2015.

See: <https://hausderkunst.de/en/exhibitions/vivan-sundaram-disjunctures>

Messages from Okwui to Vivan

Okwui Enwezor initiated the exhibition and was involved with it at all stages of its preparation. Because of his illness, he could not be present at its inauguration. He did, however, see it a few months later, in September of 2018. I quote below from some of the messages he sent me through that year, articulating his thoughts and illuminating the potential of my work. Okwui was happy that I share his words on appropriate occasions.

5 May 2018

Your exhibition means a great deal to me, not least because of its power, complexity, subtlety, politics, and above all, humanism. These qualities are rare in the art of our time. The fact that you have sustained such a critical, ethical, aesthetic, and material inquiry through your art over many decades and in the current crisis of the global sphere and the looming democratic deficit, the exhibition becomes more than timely.

[Late] May 2018

Dearest Vivan, I am truly proud and grateful that your exhibition will go up as a shining banner for the intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural values that I cherish.

We shall embrace in Munich in a few weeks.

All my love, Okwui

8 June 2018

Dearest Vivan and Geeta,

Thanks so much my dear friends for your very kind words. As you can see from recent shifts in Europe, the tide in rigorous museum leadership is now beginning to turn towards a more conformist and bureaucratic model of neo-liberal justification in terms of how museums deal with strong, difficult ideas that are not overloaded with extra-sensory manipulation of the public's sentiments.

Yet, I deeply believe that the museum is just such a place where we must always remain attentive to how the shapes of thought that make contemporary art such an enlivening site of debate and discovery can be maintained against the zealotry of perverse cultural politics and provincialism. We must continue to dare to inscribe the important place of art, and its complex logics, across time, histories, and changing contexts as the first priority of the museum.

It was, indeed, my privilege to have worked with artists and thinkers like you whose work has had enduring legacy, and also helped to expand and establish a clear line of thinking that moves art beyond the exhibition galleries into other streams of mediating and revealing some of the core ideas that form the basis for our understanding and enjoying the capacity of art, with its constellation of formats and disciplines.

I will of course, miss the experience of constructing and orchestrating these ideas in a museum context. But my health now, and my prospects for recovery from this aggressive disease, must now become my top priority.

No doubt, I am ever-hopeful for a full recovery so that I can continue to do what I love the most, which is creating and showcasing the dynamic space of interaction and engagement with art and artists. Through that dynamism it was possible for me to fully grasp the cultural, intellectual, aesthetic, political, and historical potential of a curatorial methodology that is dense, lapidary, and accretive. The enrichment which such methodology has provided me as a thinker not only of forms and signs, but of histories and their potentialities, brought thinkers of your calibre and such penetrating insight as yours into my orbit.

We are co-travellers on this path, and I hope, whenever and wherever the opportunity presents itself, that we will continue to work together in the discussions of why art matters more than ever before.

8 July 2018

Great Vivan, I look forward to reading it [the catalogue]. Anna sent me such beautiful images of the opening and of the exhibition. The works look tremendous. And those paintings from fifty years ago are so powerfully resonant. They are true historical discovery. That flash of color and optimism amid the incipient gloom that would later come to overwhelm everything, and take us through the mortally wounded body in Memorial, and the efflorescence of the imagery and colors of the leftovers gathered together by the rag pickers in those monumental photographs in the exhibition. ...

I continue to think about the work, trying to find the right words to describe when the work invites you into its analytical field to ponder and feel. Much better to see the exhibition first before saying more. But I am proud of being able to bring to the public's attention your artistic achievement, as part of my genealogies of the contemporary, which is to write art history from the edges and not from the center. ...

11 September 2018

What a great and moving experience to walk through the exhibition. Absolutely powerful and absorbing. Memorial is a true tour de force of concentration and quietude amplified. Ramkinkar is a spectacular mini monument. Thank you Vivan, for the honor and the gift of this exhibition.

Xoxo

1 November 2018

We share so much together, even in places of divergence. But the constant is the intellectual and ethical compass that marks the trajectory of what we believe to be the artist's and critic's role in the governmentality of art, be it institutional, ideological, historical, or contemporary. More than all these is the affective dimension of our more than two decades of interaction and the way it's grown over that period. ... Keep strong and remain optimistic as I have chosen in my own health struggle. ... It's great that so many colleagues have come to see your show. It's a revelation.

The Haus der Kunst exhibition catalogue, titled Disjunctures (200 pages with 115 colour illustrations, hardcover, published by Prestel, 2018), has a Foreword by Okwui Enwezor; an Introduction by the curator, Deepak Ananth; and essays by Andreas Huyssen, Katya García Antón and Ashish Rajadhyaksha.

See: <https://hausderkunst.de/en/explore/exhibition-catalogues/vivan-sundaram-disjunctures>