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PRATEEK KUHAD

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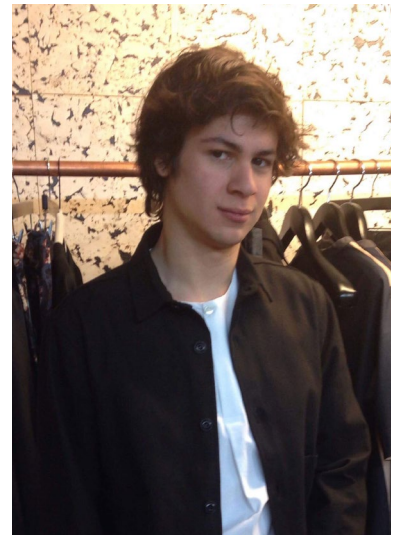
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Hello, People on the Picket Lines

I don't consider myself particularly good at writing inspiring, rhetorical political pieces and my last attempt at writing creative prose involved me aptly comparing my imagination to an overweight middle-aged man getting drunk and binging netflix shows - so I suppose the personal approach is best.

My semester's been densely packed with nights at the SU - sloshing about full of £1.50 Anti-Valentines shots - seeing student plays, getting £3 tickets at the BFI, buying way more books than I could read, going out East for food and drink, accumulating feelings for people, talking about shit I have no decent idea about and sitting in Waterfront till they play whale noises to get people to leave (which nobody notices). Everything calms with the occasional smoke I get inbetween lectures, the *actually* talkative seminar, becoming a functioning workaholic again and realising that on one weird day I plastered a whole wall with newspaper so I could start painting again - bloody finally, something peaceful. It feels like tearing into a mover's box and finding all these things you forgot you owned. Before this, I wrote this entire dreary piece about the #metoo campaign and speaking to Radio 4, talking about how important it is and how it related to some personal experiences I've had in the past. But after giving it to someone to read, I realised that I don't look back often. I don't normally like to look back on the past so much as I like to look ahead, plan ahead. It's not something I'm used to because writing about myself feels definitive - especially when you put it out for people to read. I'm afraid of writing something I regret or don't believe since when things happen, that can't be changed. But the future? That can be uncertain, *that* can be rewritten - and that's what makes it so exciting..... For the first time in months, I'm really looking forward to the year ahead, I hope you are too.



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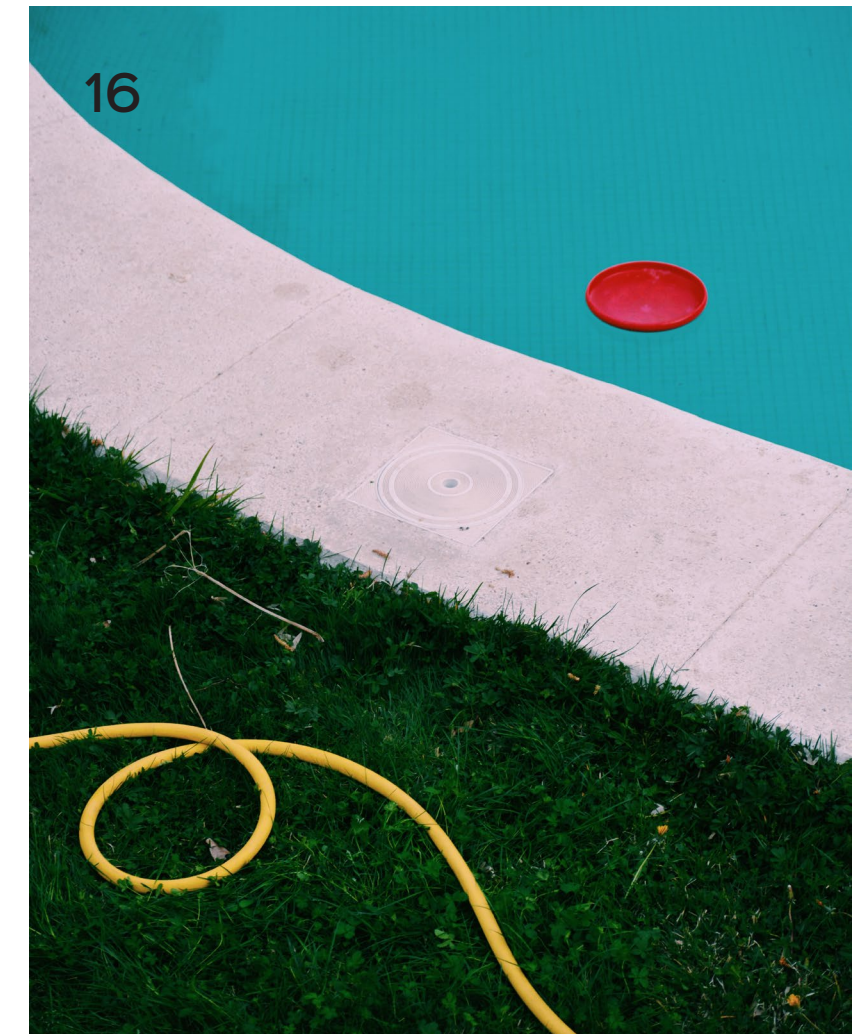
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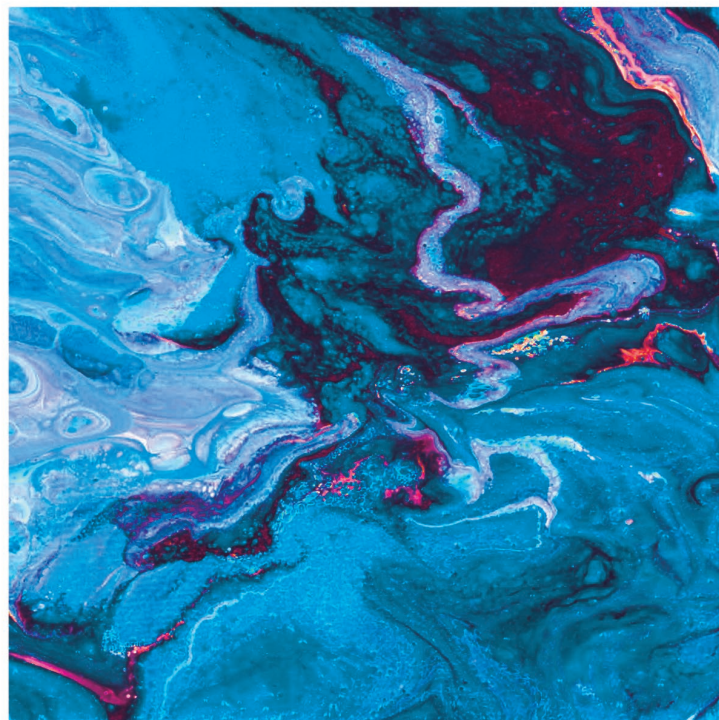
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The Anthology

Issue 01



February 2018

STRAND

The Anthology

Issue 01

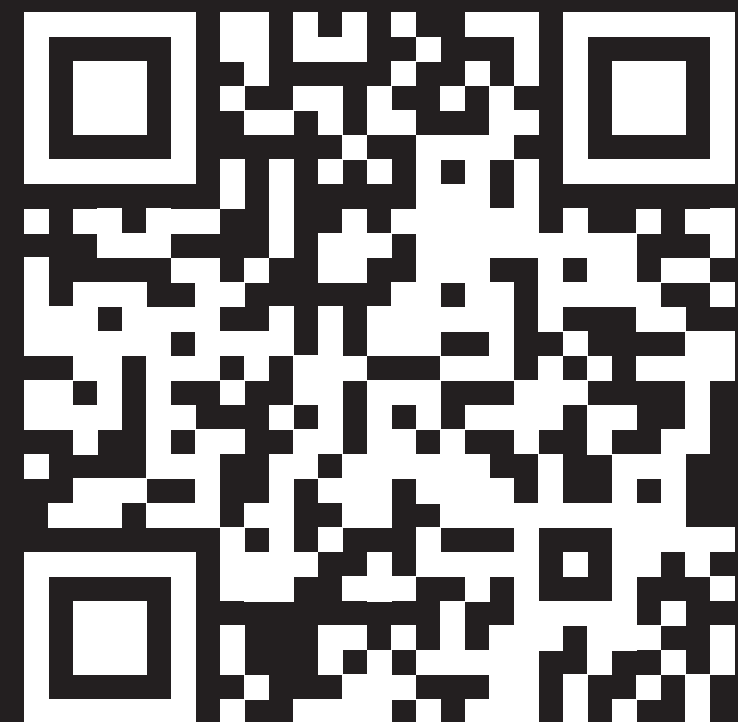
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By Nikhil Kanukuntla

Prateek Kuhad is a young singer-songwriter from Delhi, India. Part of the nation's small but growing indie music scene, his music has had hundreds of thousands of hits on Youtube, and featured on several Bollywood productions, as well as other independent films. Recently he's played the NH7 Weekender, India's biggest, multi-city music festival and is currently recording in Nashville, Tennessee. On the 29th November he made his live UK debut at Camden's The Lock Tavern in London. Strand Magazine caught up with him just before the gig for an interview, to ask him more about his songwriting process and his thoughts on the Indian music scene.

I understand that your favourite way of playing is completely unamplified, no mixers, no public address systems, and you've been gigging a lot recently. Do you still prefer that?

Yeah, for sure. In fact, a couple of months ago we did a secret concert in Delhi. It was at my house. We had a few subscribers to our mailing list and they were contacted, so it was a pretty small gig, completely stripped down. Most of the time in my life involving music it has been like that. Just me being in my room alone writing on the piano or the guitar - it's my comfort zone - so that's the only way I really enjoy the process of playing live.

Do you feel, when you're playing like that, that you're mimicking your songwriting process?

Not mimicking. Because that's not songwriting, that's a whole different thing. I couldn't ever write a song in front of other people. If I'm writing I have to be completely alone. But just having that same sort of environment where you can hear yourself unamplified. It's totally different. I can be natural and play exactly the way I want without really thinking too much.

On the matter of songwriting, I know that you get that Hindi-English language question a lot, so I won't ask you that-

I do. Thank you for not asking that!

- but do you think with your Hindi songwriting you're retaining a special relationship with your Indian fanbase?

That's not why I do it, and I don't really think that's the case either. Especially with my fans, the English songs are as popular as the Hindi ones. One of my most popular songs is 'Oh Love' which is as popular as some of my other Hindi songs like 'Raat Raazi' or 'Tum Jab Paas'. I don't really think it's a language thing. There's a lot of people I know that prefer Hindi music, maybe because they prefer the language and that resonates with them better, and vice versa. But most people don't seem to make too much of a distinction. It's not about the language for me at all when it comes to songwriting. I'm equally comfortable in both languages so it doesn't matter.

I understand that the thing that actually started you to start writing songs in Hindi was Guru Dutt's 'Pyasa'?

Yes!

Do you have any other influences for your music that help your writing, apart from your personal life?



Interview Prateek Kuhad

I think everything kind of seeps through somehow. I've been going through a Murakami phase recently, I've read 5 or 6 of his novels in a row, that's all I was reading for a couple of months. I like consuming anything pop cultural or otherwise, but there are definitely moments when your consumption increases. That's the phase I had when watching Pyaasa, I also watched a bunch of other Guru Dutt and Satyajit Ray films and listened to a lot of Hindi music from the 50s and 60s. That's when I seriously got invested in Hindi songwriting. I was reading a lot of Ghalib, Amrita Pritam and older Hindi poets and Ghazal writers generally. So, with all of that, that phase ended [laughs]. I watched Pyaasa after a long time earlier this year actually and I wept again. It's such a phenomenal film. But everything outside of my personal life has always affected me indirectly, it probably affects my vocabulary and things like that but I've never been pulled in to write after hearing a particular concept. Everything that I write about inevitably comes from a personal place.

In the short making-of documentary for your first album, 'In Tokens and Charms' you struck me as quite a perfectionist with your sound. Would you describe yourself in that way?

Yeah. Sure. I think, though, it's quite narcissistic to describe yourself as a perfectionist. I try to be particular about things.

Why do you think it's narcissistic to call yourself a perfectionist?

Because isn't that a good thing to be a perfectionist? It's also such a subjective thing. Perfection for me could be of a much lower or higher standard compared to somebody else. Who am I to say that I'm a perfectionist or not, you know? I think it's really important to get everything right, maybe some people will stop at a point where they say "okay I feel like this is working, it's fine" whereas I would stop only when everything is right, or as good as I can make it.

I wanted to talk a little bit about the indie music scene in India. The Indian music scene in general has been criticised by various voices for being oversaturated with Bollywood-

It is.

-and a lot of indie Indian fans are very protective over their few indie artists, people like you, what do you think about this bubble, this distinction, and do you feel you're sacrificing part of your integrity as an artist by getting involved in Bollywood as you have done in the past?

To me it doesn't matter where a project comes from for the most part. I wrote some music for a documentary [Abhay Kumar's 'Placebo'] for absolutely no money because I was so inspired

by the project. The documentary ended up doing well and it's on Netflix at the moment, I would definitely recommend checking it out. But with a Bollywood film I might not have that same level of investment. I might still do it because I'm getting paid for it. At the end of the day I'm a songwriter and it's a service I provide. I'm a professional and if I like the film to a certain degree, I don't have to love it, I'll get involved but I won't do it for free. There's a certain spectrum that I have but beyond that I don't care where the project comes from. That being said, of course, Indian music is totally saturated with Bollywood. I think people just assume you have to produce trash for something to be commercially successful. It's not about producing trash but one trashy movie or song does really well successfully and everybody starts replicating that exact format to get some of the income that that format has enjoyed. In India, the industries haven't seemed to caught on to the fact you can produce quality music and cinema and still be popular, and there's nothing stopping you from doing both. In regards to the indie music scene, yeah, it's totally a bubble, it's very small right now, and there's a definitely a divide in this bubble with people thinking 'fuck bollywood'.

Do you think it's a healthy divide, or a good attitude to have?

I don't think so. I definitely don't think it's required, in fact I don't think there should be any tags. They're not helpful. I mean there are lots of amazing films coming out of Bollywood. One of the films that comes to mind is 'Newton' [the Indian entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 90th Academy Awards, ultimately not nominated]. Just as there are a minority of Bollywood films that are truly great, there are a lot of indie bands and songwriters who just suck. Just judge art on the basis of itself, it shouldn't matter where it's coming from at all.

Your music videos, especially for 'Tune Kaha' and 'Tum Jab Paas' are great. What kind of influences and inspirations did you have for them?

So I didn't have anything to do with the music videos. I basically just found artists that have inspired us with what they've done before, gave them the song, and if they wanted to do something for it they did it. With Tum Jab Paas, we found this small production company in India run by two people. The director came up with the idea on the spot. With this one it was a little different because I sent over a lot of ideas myself which she incorporated, but it was primarily her.

Are you interested in being more involved with the music video process in the future?

As I learn more about the process, yes, maybe.

Directing one yourself?

I don't know about directing one myself because I've never done that before. I don't have a film background at all, and I don't like doing half-arsed stuff. But I do have ideas for music videos more fluidly now than before. It depends on the song and whatever comes from it. But my priority is doing what's best for the song and that's getting the experts involved.

Going back to your songwriting process, I know you've done a few collaborations before, but is there anyone in mind where you think, 'I'd love to work with them'?

Yeah, I always say Sia because I have a phenomenal respect for her songwriting process. Whatever she's said about her songwriting process and the kind of discipline she has is amazing. That's what I respect most about people - the work-ethic. Art itself is so subjective and changeable. With Sia it's

relentless, she makes all pop music but it's so complex and so thoughtful. With collaborations in general though I don't know. You could be expecting something and you get something totally different. Primarily I like writing by myself because that's my space. But I've started doing more co-writes recently because that's also an interesting avenue for creativity.

If there was one album or any musical piece that you wish you'd written, what would it be?

Any Elliot Smith song.

Finally, how do you want to be remembered?

[laughs] I don't know. I've never thought about that, I don't care.

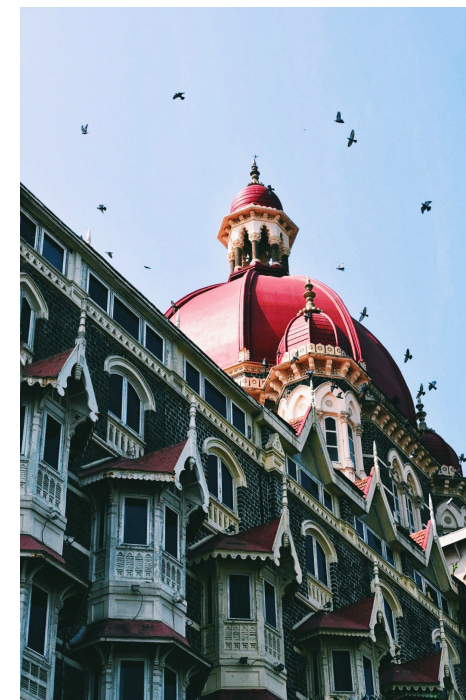
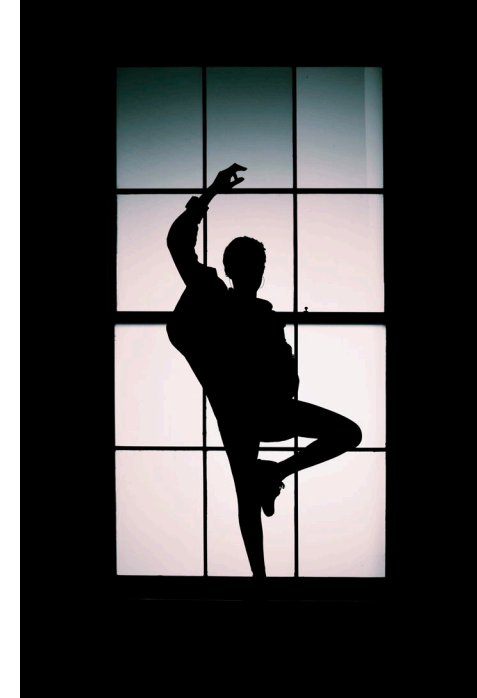
Good answer!

[laughs] Thanks.



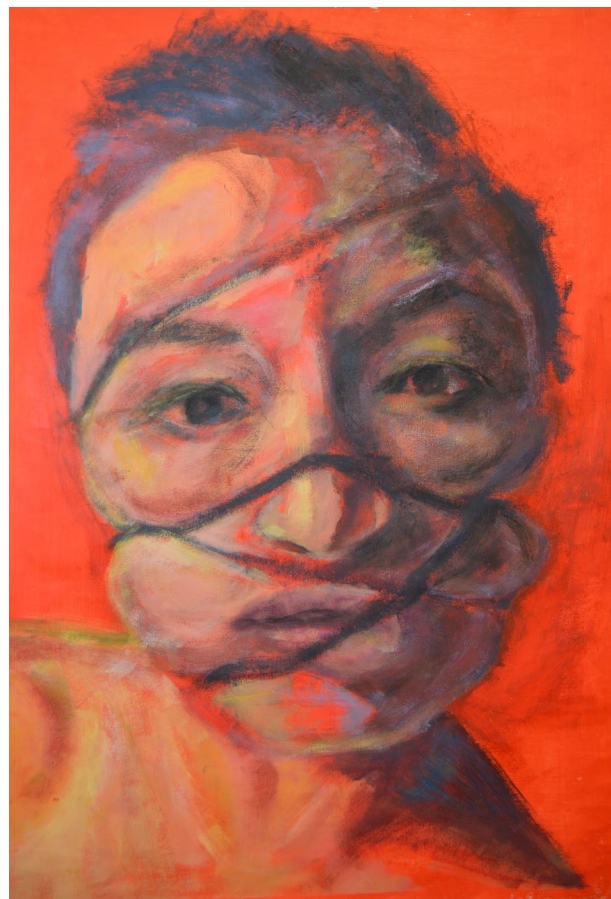
Xtra Art

Emerging Artists



***Past,
Present,
and the
Future***

XTRA.art was formed by Yinan Zhao and Ria Walia in 2015, gaining rapid credibility within South East England and becoming the youngest recipients of Arts Council England funding. As an entirely youth-led group, we provide for emerging artists who are underappreciated due to lack of support and opportunities available. We collaborate with businesses, enhancing their corporate social responsibility and also raise awareness of modern social issues through our services and activities.



We are the only organisation in the UK providing a comprehensive solution, bridging the gap between the corporate world and emerging artists.

Since 2015, XTRA.art has an intensive portfolio of delivering projects at a national level, at places such as the Tate Modern. Our portfolio includes a collective total project value of £72,000. XTRA.art's past project partners include British Museum and Tesco (Harris +Hoole). In 2017 alone, we were able to expose over 70 new, culturally diverse young artists to national audiences of 18000+ people as a result of a 214-day touring exhibition around Slough, Southwark, London, Henley-on-Thames and Oxford.

We were honoured to receive an award for our entrepreneurial skills from our local borough at the Youth Awards, in 2016 and then in 2017. Our artists have been featured in media such as BuzzFeed, Arts Council England, Slough Observer and BBC Radio 1 as well as being commended in the Foyle Young Poets of the Year Award; The Poetry Society's biggest youth poetry competition, and winning the national SLAMBassadors spoken word competition.

Your personal challenges

Ria Walia, 20, Co-Founder/Director of XTRA.art, Mathematics and Management and Finance student.

From a very young age I have been a creative individual. I grew up in an environment surrounded by artists, theatre and music. Both of my parents are artists in their own respected fields. I would usually take my colouring books to

all my mother's music video shoots, backstage at her concerts and during dance rehearsals. When I was much older, I used to sit through her studio recordings and accompany her as a backstage assistant at concerts. Thus, I saw first-hand the struggles, the successes and the complex ways in which the music industry worked.

Nevertheless, I found myself being the odd one out, as I wasn't as artistic as my parents, nor could I live without taking up creative projects. Going to a Grammar school really brought out my intellectual and academic talents. I was drawn into more logical subjects and started to really enjoy mathematics. Although, I took up textiles and realised I was gifted in creating garments, designing and tailoring. By my A-Levels, I wanted to give the 'artist in me' one last chance and took up AS Art, keeping in mind I hadn't taken the subject at GCSE. I was frustrated by the limitations set out by strict guidelines and markschemes. This ruined my perspective of studying Art as a subject. I realised nothing written in a uncompromising course could resemble the experiences I had earlier on in my life witnessing the creative industry. As a result, my creativity was repressed by grades, which led to the initial idea of XTRA.art. My classmates also shared the same views as I did.

When both Yinan Zhao, a fellow classmate, and I were 17, he had told me about a local arts organisation that was happy to fund a small amount of money towards a showcase. We decided to take that small amount of money to host our first exhibition, 'Juxtaposition' in Hoxton, London. We were extremely grateful for the support we had from our local arts organisations because without them, we wouldn't have been able to dream big. We then asked our fellow frustrated colleagues in our Art class to

join us and exhibit their work too. Little did we know that these were the foundations of our business and several years working together as business partners. We had ample success in London and thought to ourselves, what is stopping us in turning this into a business and promoting and supporting even more emerging artists, like our classmates? This led to the birth of XTRA.art.

After becoming the youngest ever recipients of Arts Council England funding in 2017 alone, XTRA.art was able to expose over 70 new, culturally diverse young artists to national audiences of 18000+ people as a result of a 214-day touring exhibition around Slough, Southwark, London, Henley-on-Thames and Oxford. We now hold a project portfolio of £72000. In the past three years, I was able to share my passion for supporting emerging art by hosting events and conferences at national platforms such as the Tate Modern, University of Oxford and by partnering up with the British museum and Tesco.

At present, I am a first year student at King's College London, studying Mathematics with management and finance. I regularly receive advice and support from the King's Entrepreneurship Institute to expand and grow my business further. With their help, XTRA.art was chosen out of 100s of startups across London for the 2018 Kick Start London pre-accelerator programme. Looking to the future, we plan to host an exhibition at King's in collaboration with the KCL Animal Rights and Vegan society to raise awareness of modern social issues, through showcasing artwork produced by emerging artists. Additionally, we propose to collaborate with businesses enhancing their corporate social responsibility. Ultimately, we will be bridging the gap between the corporate

world and emerging artists. I believe that every emerging artist should be encouraged to stretch their creativity and XTRA.art will be a catalyst for those dreams.

How do you source artwork

We are currently working with University students who are ambitious and want to strive for further excellence, hence why we work closely with Societies within the Universities of London, University of Oxford and Durham University. We aim to raise awareness of modern social issues through the artwork of emerging artists at our exhibitions and showcases.

Reach XTRA.art on:
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Zainab Karkhanawala

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Yuhong Wang

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Hana Basi

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Millenium Bridge, Pg 17 (Above)

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Going Beyond a Simple Diagnosis

By Artemis Adamantopoulou

I was called an “anti-feminist” on two separate occasions in the span of 6 months, something which seems absurd, ridiculous, and just blatantly paradoxical. But I’m not going to delve into the specific conversations I was having with the people who accused me of such an oxymoronic title, instead I shall talk about the ‘realist’ experience I’ve had with sexual harassment.

I was in Milan with my family two years ago, and after a long day of gasping at price tags and gorging gelato and pasta as the true generic tourists we were, we decided to live the city life and use the metro as substitute for a 20-minute walk. It was the Champions League final, and the metro was swarming with Atletico jerseys and Real Madrid sex dolls angelically gliding from one side of the platform to the next in a lattice of swerving whites and reds. As I was standing among the chanting, animated fans, I couldn’t help but feel a tinge of discomfort from being surrounded by this loud, and almost cultist environment. But that feeling of discomfort soon took the form of a hand I felt ride up the back of my skirt and pinch my inner thigh, my instant reaction was to turn around, but in the billowing mass that was: riled-up Champions League fans, I could not seem to identify who it was. My heart dropped, I felt ashamed, embarrassed, disgusted, I blamed myself for wearing a skirt, and I blamed myself for being too feminine; I blamed myself for being in the metro, and I blamed myself for blaming myself. I couldn’t even build up the courage to tell my mother what had just happened out of pure guilt that I had somehow, provoked it.

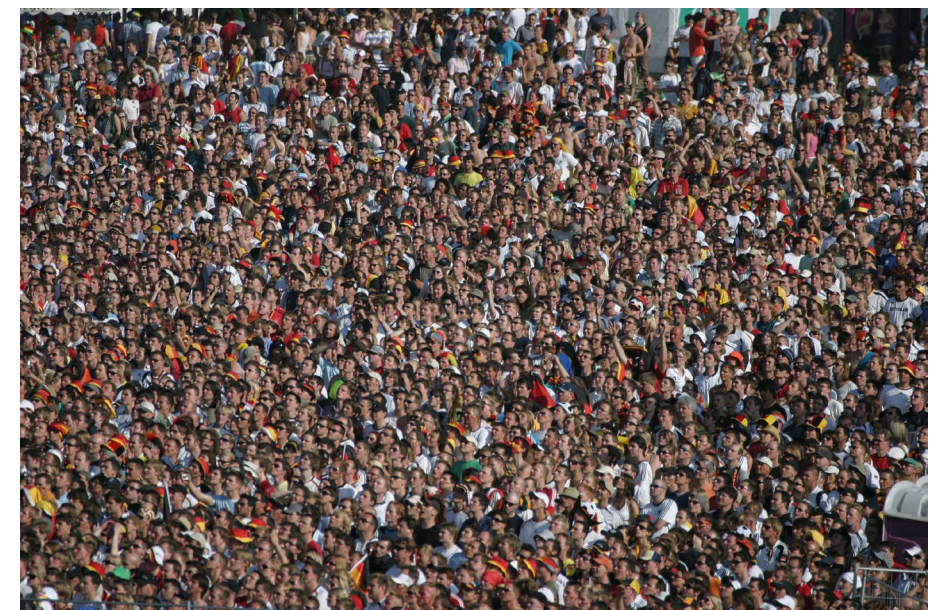
Needless to say, I was plagued by this unshakable thought for the rest of the day. Yet as invaded as I felt, as angry as I was at this faceless, body-less male hand, part of me was certain that the only reason he thought he could do so was because he knew he was acting in pure anonymity - he was acting as part of a crazed mob, and not as an individual. The man who’s hand I despised, was probably not even capable of rape. And that is an important distinction to make, especially nowadays where it seems that the #metoo craze is paving the way for this inundation of sexual harassment suits, placing all sexual harassment allegations ranging from the ass-grabbing pervert on the Milanese metro to Weinstein on the same strata. By leveling

the plates we aren’t catering to each sexual harassment case appropriately and it instead results into a tactless frenzy of vilifying an entire gender, something which will only worsen the predator-prey dynamic which, by many women, is felt as a dominating interaction between the sexes.

If the aim is to emancipate ourselves from the woman’s need to take precautionary measures every time she is alone on the street out of fear of being harmed, or to be ready to escape when saying “no” to someone, out of fear that they interpreted it as a “maybe”, then maybe we should be following Mary Beard’s example in *Women & Power*, of going beyond “the simple diagnosis of misogyny that we tend a bit lazily to fall back on”. What is meant by this is that in order to understand the socio-cultural strictures under which the predator-prey dynamics and by extension misogyny is established, a lot more than just blatantly labelling people misogynists, rapists, perverts and harassers needs to be done. The whole historical, cultural and to some extent biological baggage which this issue carries throughout the course of time needs to be unpacked.

Countless times I’ve heard people say “instead of teaching women how to dress appropriately, how about we teach men not to rape”. And that precise mentality, which is used as leverage in this whole sexual harassment dialogue we’ve been engaging in for the past year is the problem. Because the truth is not all men are rapists, and those who do won’t stop- especially if you start angering them further with protests. The deliberate simplicity with which this statement is made is the exact reason why no silver lining will be found. And while I’m not entirely sure what the right approach is, I am certain it involves reading more Mary Beard, and less of participating in trending hashtags.

The issue of sexual harassment is one suffused with complicated social and psychological intricacies. When trying to fix an imperfection in cured polymer clay, you use a needle and gently poke it, and then you brush over it with utmost precaution so as to avoid getting air bubbles, you don’t grab a knife and start chiseling your piece away as if you’re Leatherface from the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* series. So like with the clay, when dealing with an issue which goes all the way back to the Greco-Roman times, the approach needs to be nuanced and educated.



What can one make of the open letter against the #metoo movement?



By Victor Chaix

A war is raging in France. Inside the very world of feminism is battling different views and opinions on the Weinstein affair and the #metoo movement that followed. After the publication of an open letter denouncing the #metoo movement in *Le Monde*, an overflow of tribunes, articles, opinions and shouting has invaded French newspapers and magazines: seemingly liberating another voice in the debate of sexual harassment. In my view, very rich material has been written in France in response to the letter which can be of a huge interest for the feminist cause and contribute to the essential questions that feminism faces today: what kind of feminism do we want? Such a burning, sensible, controversial but ultimately fundamental debate facing our times. I will argue for the co-existing possibility of both the success of the #metoo's movement and of the truth value in the controversial open letter and the discourse that followed it.

Some context on this tribune that appeared in *Le Monde* in early January, signed by 100 French women personalities, including French New Wave actress Catherine Deneuve as well as writers, artists and psychologists.

The letter can be broadly presumed as a rejection of a certain puritanism that has supposedly appeared in consequence the Weinstein affair, against a certain feminism that expresses a "hate of man". The tribune begins by acknowledging the 'legitimacy' of the awareness movement that followed the Weinstein affair, that notably affected the professional area where a considerable amount of men abused their hierarchical power. 'It was necessary', the letter begins. The letter then quickly shifts in an open accusation of how the movement went too far: 'Just like in the good old witch-hunt days, what we are once again witnessing here is puritanism in the name of a so-called greater good, claiming to promote the

liberation and protection of women, only to enslave them to a status of eternal victim and reduce them to defenseless preys of male chauvinist demons'. In a j'accuse style of unexpected passion and conviction, these women accuse this 'frenzy for sending the "pigs" to the slaughterhouse': far from helping women empower themselves, this generalized accusation would serve 'the interests of the enemies of sexual freedom'. A very French and libertarian type of feminism one could say, always trying to conciliate feminism with the sexual liberation and freedom. These women deplore a growing censorship in art, sometimes solely because of the artist's past actions, 'confusing the man with his work'.

They are obviously worried about the dérives of the movement. As a striking example, they state the presented bill in Sweden that calls for explicit consent before any sexual relations. This proposition is 'bordering on the ridiculous' according to them, satirising that in the near future 'we'll have a smartphone app that adults who want to sleep together will have to use to check precisely which sex acts the other does or does not accept'. Personally, I found this dystopian prediction pretty accurate considering modern trends in terms of sexual procedures. The phrase that mainly stood out for French and foreign critics was the polemical affirmation to 'defend a freedom to bother as indispensable to sexual freedom', distinguishing a sexual harassment from an awkward flirting. This vague sentence created a wave of justified comments: indeed, where do we draw the line between the two? A few days and some thousands of tweets after the publication of the tribune, Catherine Deneuve replied in the left-wing journal of *Libération* that a herd mentality is 'too common today' on this kind of issue, as well as affirming that 'nothing in [the letter] pretends that sexual harassment has some goodness' all the while excusing herself to victims that may have been offended by its contents.

Different and varied reactions have ensued this collective accusation. Actress Laetitia Casta has argued her vision of feminism to be 'a struggle for woman, not against man, for respect and not against

the expression of desire, for a relational harmony', relativising the movement by saying that 'we have to rejoice ourselves of the awareness-raising of this phenomena, all the while not wishing that we take advantage of this for diabolising man'. Samantha Geimer, sexual victim of film-maker Roman Polanski when she was only 13 years old, deplores a 'society that valorises weakness and suffering in women'. In her view, 'the cause of woman should render us stronger, not transform us into eternal victims that should be protected from the world, men, sex... and themselves'. Indeed, as interestingly observed, 'it is sad that a confident woman, having survived a tragedy, is less interesting than the spectacle of a woman twisted with pain'.

But it is French writer Belinda Canone's contribution to the debate which I found the most interesting and constructive. 'An important part of feminism that developed since 1949 has the beauty and maturity to always have avoided many traps, principally the call of a genre war and its corollary, victimism, but also a puritanism that, we see it abroad, transforms the love commerce into a procedure and affects the idea itself of desire, with what it engages of risk, unexpected and tension'. In a continuation of Deneuve's argument, she explains that we have to be wary of 'the confusion that can be born between the expression of desire and the violence of masculine domination'. What she calls for is thus a profound transformation and revolution in seduction comportments and roles, reaching in my view the core of the whole sexual harassment issue. In a beautifully stated prediction, she declares that 'the day when women will feel perfectly authorized for expressing their desire, where the enterprise of seduction will be truly shared, they will not be preys and will not perceive themselves as such'. As she views it, 'Everybody would win of a real equality in eroticism, an equality that necessarily passes by taking initiatives and risks, and not by unlikely "contracts", very far from what plays itself in desire'.

Even the best intentions can insidiously lead to a certain sort of regression. I believe that the recent profusion of articles

and debate around the sexual harassment issue is profoundly revealing of debates inside the very world of feminism. I find it essential to realize the profundity of this problem's causes, which won't solely be solved by a generalized accusation of masculine sexual intimidation, and to be aware of, ultimately, the sinuosity of any progress movement. What we can make of this controversial open letter and its following discourse is a premonitory observation of a certain feminism that is destructive to sexual life.

You will excuse me for this yet other francophone reference: this time it is leading feminist author Simone de Beauvoir which I will invoke. In her conclusion of *The Second Sex*, she predicts that 'the humanity of tomorrow will be living in its flesh and in its conscious liberty [...] [in which] new relations of flesh and sentiment of which we have no conception will arise between the sexes'. Touching in my view the core of feminism's goal, de Beauvoir envisions a world where from an equality between the sexes arises an unprecedented sexual liberty.

This tribune had the interest of presenting us another side in the debate, and permitted a lot of food for thought concerning problems of sexual procedure, of roles in seduction, of our perspective on sexual victims, of censorship in art and, I would say, even of social media herd behavior in our contemporary world.

A lot has to be done in the still very young feminist movement, and the progress will be a messy one, not a unidirectional. In this article, I do not pretend of objectivity, I may even admit that being a man may lower my authority on the subject. My intent, nevertheless, before anything, is to promote balance, nuance and perhaps even equilibrium in an arguably over-divided and thus unconstructive debate. This catalogue of sexually-maniac French intellectuals' point of views deserves a place in the debate. All of that being said, it is you students who will draw the future of feminism, not old Catherine Deneuve.



