



Shailesh BR, *Philosophy Machine*, 2017
Wood, motor, kerosene lamp, blower, gas
torch
Kinetic sculpture
91x61cm
Photo: Dinesh Maneer
Courtesy Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi

The Last Brahmin Shailesh BR

Shailesh BR considers himself The Last Brahmin in his family. The source of his self-proclaimed title emerges from *The Last Brahmin: Life and Reflections of a Modern-Day Sanskrit Pandit*, a book authored by Rani Siva Sankara Sarma published in 2012, an autobiographical work positioned as a narrative of learning, scholarship, and the rigours of pedagogical discipline.

In the show, **The Last Brahmin**, Shailesh BR endeavours to unravel various layers of caste practice revisiting its core structure, decoding the idea of inheritance, formation and deformation. **The Last Brahmin** will refer to ancient knowledge and practices but will interpret it further by being present in it to find awareness of its meaning in today's socio-political paradigm. Living away from home, and the holy land itself, will offer a spiritual exile - a time for deep meditation, introspection and implosion.

Though the spatial divisions and partitions will be imaginary, the exhibition space, its objects and rituals will be based on a traditional Brahminical house plan and its associated usage governed by the laws of Vastu Shastra (traditional system of architecture). "For people of other castes, entry into a Brahmin's house continues to be restricted in my village, which must create a curiosity amongst them about what we look like inside." He intends to challenge these Brahminical mores of hospitality. "The position I maintain is that anyone can be a Brahmin simply by being exposed to certain systems of knowledge. Therefore, it must follow that anyone can enter a Brahmin's house as well." With an open invite to one and all to enter his space, **The Last Brahmin** desists caste based discrimination and opens the door to conversation.

As a show, **The Last Brahmin** will have a beginning and an end, becoming an experiential chapter within itself, whether of great revelations or ... deeper confusions, time will tell. **The Last Brahmin** will take possession of his space and prepare it for an opening ceremony when an unrestricted world will be welcomed to enter, observe, inspect, participate, and exit anytime over 3 lunar cycles. "I have observed these cycles of rituals to have the pattern of Projecting > Maintaining > Suffocating with hypnotic monotony." He will begin these days with Sandhavandanam, an elaborate prayer routine that includes reciting the Vedas, meditating and performing yoga-yaga. He intends to sustain a ritualistic fire through the period, even if it is the size of a candle flame. Through the days, depending on his "State of Mind" he will express himself through writings and drawings. He will embrace and maintain the Janeu - the holy thread, everyday. **The Last Brahmin** will mark the end of this observation period with a closing ceremony to culminate his learnings and interpretations of this chapter.

PRACTICAL INFORMATIONS

From February 14 to May 03.2020.

Open every day except Tuesday
from 2 to 6 PM.

Closed on May 01.

Free admission.

Social networks

#TheLastBrahmin

#ShaileshBR

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Shailesh BR, *Untitled*, 2011-2020
Ink, water color, gum tape, acrylic on raw canvas
51x90 cm
Photo: Shailesh BR
Courtesy of the artist

Translation: Claire Bernstein

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The Last Brahmin intends to blur any perceived boundaries between anyone who comes to visit him. The bramin/artist shares personal memories to create friendship, empathy and familiarity by interweaving his life events into a visual narrative and incorporating religious and introspective elements alongside stimulating research material. Shailesh has been conceptually (d)evolving as The Last Brahmin with drawings, paintings, sculptures, found objects and machines. This chapter of spiritual exploration will also include artistic interventions with traditional mediums like palm leaves which were used to create manuscripts, examining the compulsive practice of puja (worship), and the antiquity of traditional daily-use objects and sacred Brahminical accessories.

Curator : **Vitarka Samuh**

Shailesh BR

"My ideation begins with several drawings that serve as illustrations of my everyday thoughts like rituals or blueprints and documents the possibilities of my work. It imagines the construction of a device that may eventually be an object or exist as a thought. I deal with complex 'machines' and simplify them in terms of their physicality and function, to make them more representational of human needs and/or want; just like mechanisms sometimes exist in society irrespective of their actual necessity. Raised in a small village in South India without access to basic electricity during my childhood, my introduction to mechanics during my higher education greatly fascinated me. This fascination with my practice is applied to solve queries and answer questions of philosophies and existence. My practice remains a reaction not only to an object/practice that I see and interact with, but also its sensibility, meanings, practical, conceptual or metaphorical connotations. I thereby "repurpose" objects to alter their function and inject them with of satire to criticize its political, social or cultural significance.

Before art, I studied Sanskrit. The play between an external beauty or functionality of a form/object, its inner meaning, extended connotations, and the consequential critical analysis of the object is what is embodied in the Tarka Shastra way of thought and is what excites my practice as well.

Vitarka Samuh is an open collective seeking views, perspectives, models and membership towards a constructive humanitarian dialogue with the objective of informally resolving root causes of discrimination and social injustice in India. Being an informal humanitarian dialogue, we intend to cascade it from the individual down to the family, peers, community, region, country and the world at large.



Shailesh BR, *The first Earthquake*, 2015
Wood, motor, paper, pen. Kinetic sculpture
121x60x60 cm
Photo: Khoj, New Delhi. Courtesy of the artist



Shailesh BR, *Kshirdhara (Milk thread)*, 2017
Wood, stone, iron, motor, honey, milk, wax, sandalwood
Kinetic sculpture
60x20 cm
Photo: Dinesh Maneer
Courtesy Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi



Spiritual objects (from a collection of household objects)
Date unknown
Métal and Conch
4x4x8 cm
Photo: Shailesh BR
Courtesy Ramamurthy BS