

# Sutapa Biswas: Birdsong

August 29—October 8, 2006

Produced in collaboration with the Institute for International Visual Arts (inIVA), London, England and presented in conjunction with the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art's 2006 TBA Festival.

## PUBLIC ARTIST TALK AND RECEPTION AT REED COLLEGE

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2006, 6:30 p.m. 314 Eliot Hall on the Reed College campus, followed by a public reception for the artist at the Cooley Gallery. This FREE public lecture by Sutapa Biswas is an exceptional opportunity to hear Biswas speak about her work and engage her in conversation. No reservations required. Eliot Hall is just off the circle in the center of the Reed campus. Signs will direct visitors upstairs to the lecture room. Closest parking is in the east parking lot off of Woodstock Blvd (between 36th and 39th streets). See additional programming below.

## Sutapa Biswas: Birdsong

"Birds punctuate our sense of time and haunt us either in their presence or in their absence wherever we travel." —Sutapa Biswas

Over the last twenty years, Sutapa Biswas has created an intensely evocative and challenging body of work engaged with cultural identity and history. Her most ambitious project to date, **Birdsong** (2003–05) is comprised of two 16 mm films and a suite of works on paper that explore memory and rites of passage. Through the medium of film, the artist takes the viewer on metaphorical journeys, mapping human relations and describing the transitional and transforming nature of intimate and familial relationships. Inspired by English artist George Stubbs' 1759 painting *Lord Holland and Lord Albermarle Shooting at Goodwood*, **Birdsong** recreates a room that belongs to both the contemporary world and that of previous generations. Seen through the eyes of the artist's son— who longs to live with a horse— **Birdsong** conveys the potential of imaginary realms born of play and desire. Biswas recalls how the pleasure and intense beauty of shooting the film and being able to realize her son's wishes were tinged with a mother's worst fear for her small child's safety in such close proximity to the powerful horse. In the film, time is slowed as a means of awakening memory and conveying insight into human relationships such as those between an artist-mother and her son. The doubling of the film, each copy playing seconds apart from the other, creates cyclical patterns of cross referencing; the narrative seems mirrored in conversation with itself, further ensnaring the viewer in a playful dream-like world.

The igniting of birds sculpted from magnesium ribbon in a wintry orchard of a stately home in *Magnesium Bird* presents viewers with the artist's visualization of enlightenment and transformation. *Magnesium Bird* is a lucid dream that returns and haunts. The film symbolically refers to rites of passage: the death of Biswas' father and the ongoing presence of her son, one of

the children playing in the background of the film. The artist deliberately chose a setting that evokes memories of the British empire, colonialism and slavery as the origins of Harewood House coincide chronologically with the beginnings of the colonial relationship between England and India, the country Biswas left as a young child. Dealing with Jove, loss and trepidation, the film combines magical birds, mythic children, and fire and ashes, in a work that defies any single cultural, psychoanalytical or geographical reading.

Biswas' suite of bird drawings (2003-04) is inspired by the tradition of English biological exploration and classification, particularly during the Victorian era, the time of Charles Darwin's revolutionary study of avian anatomy. These expressive pencil drawings and paintings are also based on the late 19th century watercolors of the English writer Edward Lear, whose humorous limericks and social satire have long played a role in the artist's work. We enter *Birdsong* through these vibrant yet humble birds, absorbing and, in a sense, shedding systems of classification as we pass through into darkened, more imaginary spaces. Together, *Birdsong* charts a journey from the historical to the personal, from scientific systems into more illogical spaces of artistic play— into the magical, and back again.

### **Biography: Sutapa Biswas**

Sutapa Biswas was born in Santineketan, India in 1962. She lives and works in London, England, where she is a lecturer at the University of Southampton and the Chelsea College of Art and Design, (University of the Arts, London). Biswas studied at the Royal College of Art, the Slade School of Fine Art, and at the University of Leeds. Biswas has had solo exhibitions at the Douglas. F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College, Portland, Oregon (2006); the Art Gallery of Ontario, Canada (2000); Atlas Studio Space, London (1994); Plug In Gallery, Winnipeg, Canada and Galerie OBORO, Montreal (1993); 'Synapse' City Art Gallery, Leeds; Photographer's Gallery, London; and The Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies (1992). She has participated in many group exhibitions, including 'From Tarzan to Rambo,' Tate Modern, London (2002); and 'The Unmapped Body: 3 Black British Asian Artists,' Yale University Art Gallery, Connecticut (1998).

### **Artist's Monograph**

A specially produced monograph on Sutapa Biswas was published by inIVA and the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College, Portland, Oregon with contributions by Ian Baucom, Guy Brett, Sutapa Biswas, Laura Mulvey, Moira Roth, Griselda Pollock and Stephanie Snyder. The catalog is available at the Cooley Gallery for \$20.00.

## Programming

### ADDITIONAL PUBLIC SHOWINGS AND EVENTS

SEPTEMBER 7—30, 2006

Sutapa Biswas exhibits drawings and video work at the Elizabeth Leach Gallery. Represented in Portland by the Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Biswas exhibits a suite of drawings inspired by insomnia, and a video work about the experience of childhood play.

For more information please visit the ELG website.

SEPTEMBER 9 and 10, 2006

Sutapa Biswas film screenings at TBA

Saturday, Sept 9, 4-4:30 pm / Sunday, Sept 10, 4-4:30 pm

The Cooley Gallery and PICA present two of Biswas most enigmatic films, *The Trials and Tribulations of Mikey Baker*, 1997, and *Woman in Blue Weeping*, 1996, plus the world premiere of Biswas' most recent film project: *The Remembrance of Things Past*, 2006. Northwest Film Center's Whitsell Auditorium 1219 SW Park, Portland OR. \$6 PICA members, \$7 general, tickets at the door or through the PICA website.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2006

TBA institute CHAT "Gods, Heroes and Monsters" moderated by Daniel Duford.

Join Portland artist Daniel Duford (PNCA) as he facilitates a discussion with TBA exhibiting artists Matthew Day Jackson and Sutapa Biswas, joined by PICA visual arts curator Kristan Kennedy and Cooley Gallery curator Stephanie Snyder. The conversation addresses the exploration of myth in contemporary art. The conversation takes place in the Pacific Northwest College of Art commons from 12:30-1:30 p.m. It is free to PICA members and TBA pass holders and \$5 otherwise. PNCA is located at 1241 Johnson Street. Bring your lunch and join us.

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FREE PUBLIC LECTURE AND EXHIBITION RECEPTION

6:30 p.m. 314 Eliot Hall on the Reed College campus, followed by a public reception for the artist at the Cooley Gallery.

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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2006

BACK ROOM SUPPER EVENT AT SIMPATICA

6:30 p.m. SIMPATICA restaurant.

Matthew Stadler returns with his second year of the back room, an occasional series of sumptuous feasts featuring conversations with and original texts by noted artists, writers and other thinkers. Stadler begins the year by hosting an evening with Sutapa Biswas, who will have an intimate after-dinner conversation with guests facilitated by exhibition curator Stephanie

Snyder. The entire meal, drinks included, is \$45, and SIMPATICA is located at 828 SE Ash, Portland, OR.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2006

SUTAPA BISWAS PERFORMANCE AT TBA, approximately 8:30 p.m.

Held at the TBA Works at AudioCinema, 226 Madison St. under the Hawthorne Bridge

As the Portland sun sets, a flock of songbirds crafted from flammable magnesium tape will ignite along the streets under the Hawthorne Bridge. Biswas stages a performance reinterpreting the enigmatic pyrotechnics of her film work *Magnesium Bird* on view at the Cooley Gallery. Biswas' birds join the Chapman School's Vaux's Swifts as part of Portland's mythology surrounding avian migration, community and perseverance. Come share in this communal haunting. Free to TBA pass holders, \$8 PICA members, \$12 general ... tickets at the door or through the PICA website. For more about the performance and TBA click [this link](#).