

Neeta Madahar

01 June - 9 July 2005 at inIVA

Madahar's new film *Falling* reflects on the dream-like temporality of nature and memory. Sycamore seeds tumble slowly toward the viewer in a dramatic moment that echoes naturally occurring phenomena while at the same time revealing itself to be highly orchestrated. Madahar's first film *Falling* has been commissioned by Fabrica, Photoworks and inIVA.

The Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA) is a contemporary arts organisation promoting artists from diverse cultural backgrounds through exhibitions, publications, research and educational ventures. inIVA has a special interest in new technologies, international collaborations and commissioning site-specific artworks.

Wednesday-Saturday, 12-6pm
Admission free

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Image: Neeta Madahar, *Falling*,
production still (Detail) 2005

inIVA

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ENGLAND

FABRICA

Selected Biography

Education

2004

National Graduate Seminar, The Photography Institute, Columbia University, New York, U.S.

2003

M.F.A. Studio Art, School of the Museum of Fine Arts (S.M.F.A.) and Tufts University, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

1999

B.A. Fine Art, Winchester School of Art and University of Southampton, Winchester, England.

1998

European Socrates Exchange Program - three-month study visit, Barcelona, Spain.

1996

Foundation Diploma in Art and Design, City of Bath College, Bath, England.

Selected Solo Shows

Oct 2005

Forthcoming show at Fabrica, Brighton, England.

2005

Neeta Madahar, Institute of International Visual Arts, London, England.

Sustenance, Julie Saul Gallery, New York, U.S.

2004

Sustenance, curated by Martin Parr, Rencontres d'Arles Photography Festival, Arles, France.

Sustenance, Fidelity Investments, Boston,

Massachusetts, U.S.

Sustenance, Purdy Hicks Gallery, London, England.

Sustenance, Howard Yezerski Gallery, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

2003

New Work, Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.

Recent Digital Prints, Project Space, New England School of Art & Design, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

Selected Group Shows

2004

Sanctuary: Photography and the Garden, Fermynwoods Contemporary Art, Brigstock, Kettering, England.

National Graduate Seminar Fellows Exhibition, The LeRoy Neiman Gallery, Columbia University School of the Arts, New York, U.S.

Mostyn 2004, Oriel Mostyn Gallery, Llandudno, Wales.

Masala: Diversity and Democracy in South Asian Art, William Benton Museum of Art, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut, U.S.

For the Birds, Artspace, New Haven, Connecticut, U.S.

2003

Christmas Exhibition, Purdy Hicks Gallery, London, England.

Construction –

Coincidence?!: Young Photographers from the US, Momentum Gallery, Berlin, Germany.

Juried Member's Exhibition, Photographic Resource Center (P.R.C.) at Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

25hrs - International Video Art Show, Barcelona, Spain.

"The Whitney Biennial 2003", Tisch Gallery, Tufts University, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

2002

Recent Work from the SMFA, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

Prequel, Tisch Gallery, Tufts University, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

Almost Home, Fuller Museum of Art, Brockton, Massachusetts, U.S.

Juried Member's Exhibition, P.R.C. at Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

Consideraciones Al Respecto 7, Metrònom, Barcelona, Spain.

Tanto por Ciento, Domestico '02, Madrid, Spain.

2001
Evolveart: Exposición de Arte Digital, Evolvebank, Barcelona and Madrid, Spain.

Toy, Gallery fx, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

2000

International Selection of Video Art, Centro Cultural de España, Lima, Peru.

1999

It's Only Paper, Stroud House Gallery, Stroud, England.

Fresh, Old Music Hall Gallery, London, England.

Collections

DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts, U.S.

Fidelity Investments, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, U.S.

Simmons College, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England.

Wellington Management, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

Selected Awards

2003

Juror's Award, Member's Exhibition, P.R.C. at Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

Karsh Award for Photography Honorable Mention, S.M.F.A., Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

Dean's Discretionary Grant, S.M.F.A. Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

Photo District News 2003 Photo Annual, U.S.

2000-2003

Full Graduate Scholarship, S.M.F.A. and Tufts University, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

2002

Boit Award, S.M.F.A., Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

Juror's Award, Member's Exhibition, P.R.C. at Boston University, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.

1999

The Lina Garnade Memorial Trust Award, Winchester School of Art, England.

Selected Bibliography

Jackson, Camilla
Neeta Madahar: Sustenance, Portfolio Magazine, No. 41, June 2005.

McCormick, Carlo
Neeta Madahar's Ornithology, Aperture Magazine, Issue 179, Summer 2005.



Above: Neeta Madahar, *Sustenance 79*, Photograph, 2003

Smith, Roberta *Making an Entrance at Any Age*, The New York Times, May 6 2005.

Gripp, Anna *Neeta Madahar: Sustenance*, Photonews, September 2004.

O'Hagan, Sean *Conceptual art, It's a piece of cake...*, The Observer, July 18, 2004

Jobey, Liz *The World in Miniature*, The Guardian, July 14, 2004.

Horton, C. Sean *Boston, Massachusetts: Review of Sustenance*, Art Papers, May/June 2004.

Zitzewitz, Karin *Mapping South Asian Art*, Art India, Vol. 9, Issue 2, Quarter 2, 2004.

Birke, Judy, *A fowl menagerie*, New Haven Register, March 14 2004.

Hak, Marriaine *Bird in the Bush*, American Photo on Campus, March 2004.

McQuaid, Cate, *It's trouble in paradise, in sharp, funny focus*, The Boston Globe, February 27 2004.

Millis, Christopher *Terrible beauty*, The Boston Phoenix, February 20, 2004.

Smith, Roberta *Making an Entrance at Any Age*, The New York Times, May 6 2005.

Gripp, Anna *Neeta Madahar: Sustenance*, Photonews, September 2004.

O'Hagan, Sean *Conceptual art, It's a piece of cake...*, The Observer, July 18, 2004

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Neeta Madahar

in conversation with Cylena Simonds, Exhibition Organiser, inIVA

CYLENA SIMONDS: First, I thought we could talk about the multiple layers of meaning in your titles of *Sustenance* and *Falling*.

NEETA MADAHAR: I often like my titles to include a literal reference to what is going on within the image. So, for example, within *Sustenance* there's a direct reference to the seeds sustaining the bird life. But the term 'sustenance' also operates on a number of other levels. For example, when an artwork exists or becomes tangible, it also becomes a cultural artefact sustaining culture. There's a very similar connection within *Falling*: it's literally about the sycamore or 'helicopter seeds' falling, but it's also this notion of falling as an action. For one thing, it implies a loss of control, that could be pleasurable or it could be anxiety inducing.

CS: Another aspect that you're interested in, which I think affects both works, is the

cyclical nature of change. Can you talk more about that?

NM: The continuation of time was something that I wanted to allude to in the titling. For example in *Sustenance*, the number actually refers to the sheet of film I shot. It was my method for identifying the images. When I was thinking about titles, I didn't want a new title for each image: I felt that was just too much, especially as the term 'sustenance' seemed a simple and perfect encapsulation of many of my ideas. The numbering sequence included in the title worked, I felt, because it emphasised the movement of time. With *Falling* as well, there are going to be several images called *Falling 1*, *Falling 2*, *Falling 3*, etc. that again make reference to a passage of time. It's very evident in the *Sustenance* series that there are changes in the seasons, in the weather conditions and in the seed levels within the feeders, so it's all about these cycles of time with their

perpetual patterns of difference and familiarity. There is also the play between changes at a small microcosm level versus changes at the macrocosm level that I like going on in the work. With *Falling*, I wanted to again explore temporality, but this time using a childhood imaginative moment of reverie, a memory that's only a few seconds long, but then it's expanded.

I like playing with that notion of memory, that time and space can be stretched or compressed. There's a time element to these seeds falling down that can be a momentary experience in a real sense, or it can be something lasting a longer duration in a dream state.

CS: That reminds me of what we talked about before, in terms of the human desire to connect with nature, but also this desire to manipulate nature . . .

NM: For the *Sustenance* series I'd been looking outwards on to the balcony to photograph this ever-changing scene where the bird-feeders enable a particular kind of interaction with nature. There was manipulation on my part in luring the birds to the balcony; but once they were there though, I didn't have control over what they did.

One of the things that has amazed me since returning to England, after studying in the US, is the plethora of garden magazines and gardening programmes. I was just so surprised that gardeners have become these new celebrities, and that there is an emphasis on gardens being an extension of the house. I think, because I spent so much time on the *Sustenance* series looking outwards on to the landscape, I have been drawn to looking at garden spaces, what happens in nature and the constructedness of nature, how we try to insert ourselves within it and manipulate what we can.

With *Falling*, the seeds work within the confines of gravity, but there's still the possibility to manipulate their speed, rotation and trajectory through space via the control aspects of the animation software.

CS: When looking at your work, I find, both with the *Sustenance* series and the *Falling* piece, that it raises interesting questions about migration that could be considered in terms of human migration and human

immigrants. Is that something that you were thinking of when you were making the work?

NM: I think for me it's an embodied experience. Being first-generation British Asian, with my parents having come over from India in the Sixties, I grew up with a sense of, 'Well, this could be temporary. Don't ever get too settled because you may have to go home'. But actually, home as in India is more conceptual for me, as opposed to being something real and lived, because I was never raised there; it's a place that I sometimes travelled to on holiday with my family. So I think for me, because of my upbringing, transitoriness and migration are inherent. However, this was my parents' real experience: they came and settled from elsewhere. When I was growing up, we ate different food at home, and we spoke a different language. I knew that in several respects I was different from my peers, especially as at the time I went to a predominantly white school. I think my background is something that stays with me and informs my practice, especially as I return to explore events and things from my childhood. When I went to America, I thought very much about what my parents' experience must have been like, to try and make the adjustments necessary to living in a new country, and I looked at everything in a hyper-aware way. I noticed the different sounds and visual imagery, the fact that the birds are so noticeably different. That's what caught my eye and really why I spent so much time observing their behaviour on my balcony.

CS: In *Falling*, there's this element of chance in terms of whether the helicopter seeds will reach a place that will be accommodating for them, which is quite interesting to think of in terms of people immigrating and seeking asylum. People go to a new place and there's a desire or hope that it will be accommodating, but then sometimes, as we know, it's not always the case.

NM: Something I didn't realise initially when making the work, but on reflection I realised, is that I've again used the motif of the seed as a marker of time, the vehicle in a life cycle. It's a struggle to live, and as you say, sometimes things can take hold, but sometimes they don't, and



Above: Neeta Madahar, *Sustenance 87*, Photograph, 2003

it's down to chance much of the time. With a statistically large mass of seeds some will germinate and some won't.

CS: In the *Sustenance* series, I find striking the pictures that show squirrels, because the bird-feeders are for birds, and the squirrel was an uninvited guest: you often see squirrels eating more out of the bird-feeders than birds do.

NM: You know, I had absolutely voracious squirrels plundering the seeds. I wanted to include them, along with the birds, because I felt, if we're talking about sustenance here, they're part of the dynamics of what was going on. Some images are quite aggressive, some are playful; in some images, you feel a sense of abundance, whilst in others you feel a starkness and brutality. So I felt that it was important to have the squirrels there.

CS: Many viewers have commented on the surreal, uncanny colour in the *Sustenance* series. Colour seems to be very important in your work and you once mentioned to me a book called *Chromophobia* (2000) by David Batchelor.

NM: That was a really important book for me at the time. I was reading it just as I was beginning the series in spring 2002, and I found it to be relevant in terms of talking about how colour is aligned with things that are irrational, emotional or feminine, and that white or the absence of colour is rational, masculine and ordered. I wanted colour in *Sustenance* to be a means of visual seduction: it was the hook to make people feel as if they were tumbling into this scene. The colour very definitely makes things hover between being real and unreal. There's one image, *Sustenance 110*, where a bright yellow bird sits on a blue plastic bowl. The colours in nature and of plastic, artificial objects: there's a screaming intensity and similarity to the two.

CS: As you said, it's seductive and at the same time it can be unsettling. There's something idyllic and yet not quite right about them.

NM: I love dioramas. I was reading about dioramas before I began *Sustenance*, so I was really delighted when the things that I was wrestling with and thinking about

came through in the work. I like the idea that dioramas are created to be educational and informative of our world, but they're so unrealistic because time is compressed, or geographical expanses that could be hundreds of miles apart are compressed into a six-foot square say; so again there's a manipulation of time and distance.

CS: Can you comment on the process of making your first film, the difference between working on *Falling* as opposed to working on the *Sustenance* series?

NM: I enjoy the fact that I can see these connections between all the different things that I'm doing. *Falling* couldn't have happened if I hadn't made *Sustenance* first. Making work for me is very much like a helix: you come back round to the same things that interest you. However, I always feel that you're more enriched and informed by the experiences or the work that's been made before.

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