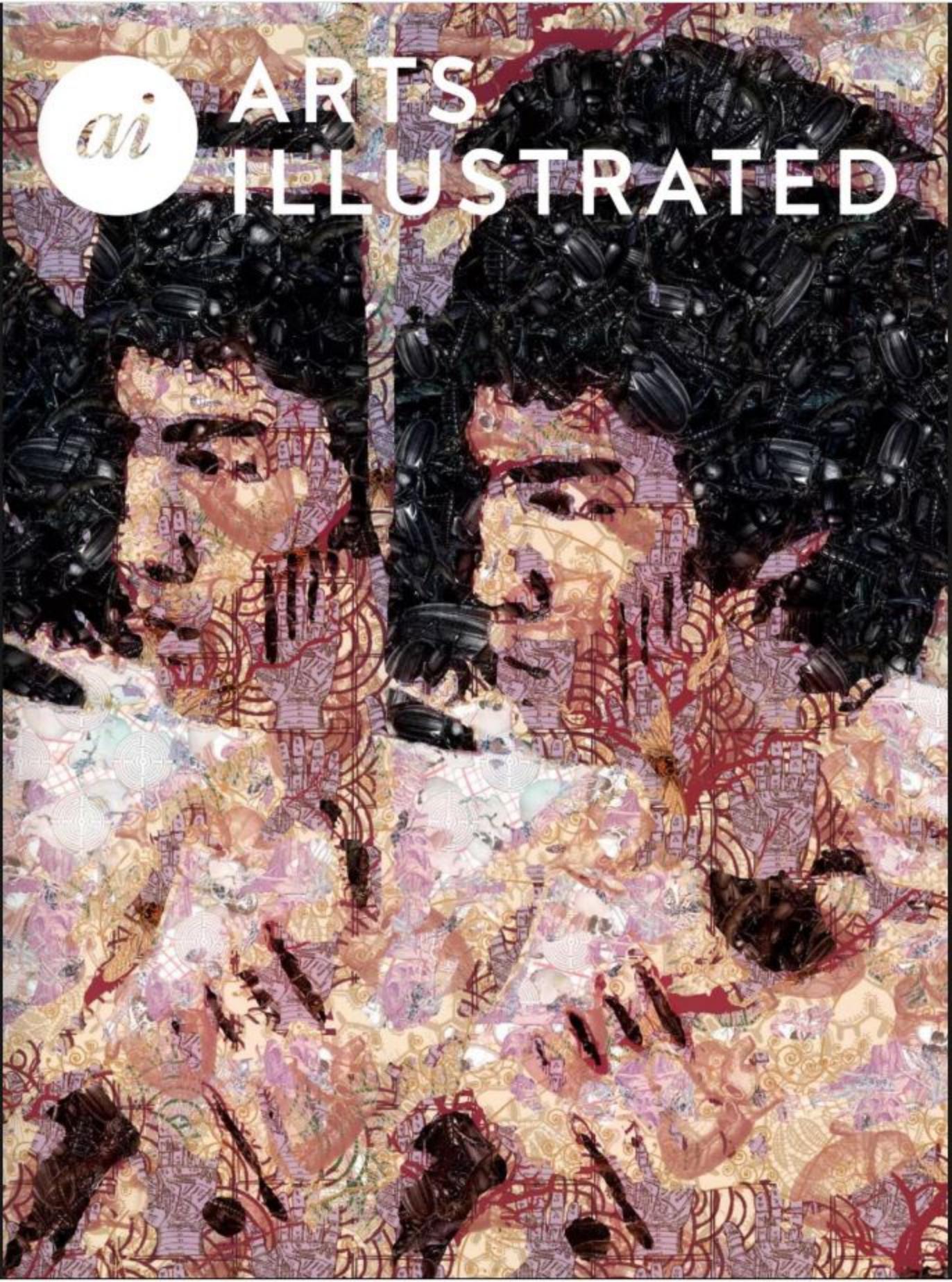




ARTS ILLUSTRATED





Simple Melodies

Navigating the chaos of the world around us, the arts provide ample instances in which to find quiet beauty and haunting melodies that fill us with restive hope and a future of gentler realities

SIDDHARTHA DAS

SOUZA
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Head by Souza, from the collection of Siddhartha Das



Public installation on the bridge during the Milan Furniture Fair or Salone del Mobile, at Zono Tortona, Milan, Italy

One of my simple pleasures is to find the daily newspaper stuffed into my front door grill and get a sense of what the world has been up to the day before. I am not a creature of habit, and this is probably the only one I have held on to doggedly for decades. But recently, I stopped this daily ritual after the overdose of depressing news. News of the city and country that seem to care less and less, with insane amounts of violence and malice directed at others. It doesn't seem like a world I want to live in. It surely seems like the world has gone mad.

It felt like I was a sprightly 23 just the other day – a joyful feeling – before the nefarious 40s snuck up

on me, unannounced. But that slightly distant other day seemed to belong to a more restive and gentler world, peopled with somehow nicer people. Or to blasphemously quote my teenage god, Pablo Neruda, 'Tonight I can write the saddest lines...' So, with tired eyes, a receding hairline and lesser energy as youth is quickly giving way to a slightly unpleasant middle age, my desperation to be a part of the better world is getting stronger. How did we allow ourselves to become a race of such horrible people?

As a creative professional, I find that my ilk should have our work cut out for us and we must rise to the occasion. We must, with quiet

determination, strategise, conceive and deliver projects that allow us to be better people, to question and feel very uncomfortable when things are not what they should be. Do parents introspect when their son becomes a rapist or a murderer, of how did their sweet little child become this monster of a man? And how do these people live with themselves, what makes them such? I am reminded of a series of drawings that the artist, F.N. Souza did about 30 years ago. The drawings resembled a head with criss-crossing jagged lines that seemed to dismember the head, as if illustrating a very disturbed person.

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Anish Kapoor's Shooting Into the Corner, an installation with a cannon that shoots a red mass of solid paint, wax and Vaseline across two galleries of the Royal Academy, London.

I spent the last three days in a wet Bhubaneswar. I am a second-generation, displaced, mixed-breed Odiya-Gujarati, with a large part of my identity shaped by both the cultures and yet not. As a part of the JD Centre of Arts in Orissa, we were hosting two 90-year legendary figures from the world of architecture – BV Doshi and Mahendra Raj. Hearing them speak about their work was incredibly humanising. While their work in itself is inspiring, it is their approach, their journeys, based on a strong sinuous life of integrity that made everyone in the packed audience realise what makes a person an

exceptional human being. Hundreds of students and professionals sat around them, softly and reverentially asking innumerable questions. The two sat patiently in the centre of this circle of adulation and answered them with generosity and warmth. Reminiscing about this lovely day, it somehow feels that everything is not lost.

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The sculptures at Pompidou Centre, in the Beaubourg area of the 4th arrondissement of Paris, was designed by the architectural team of Richard Rogers, Renzo Piano and Gianfranco Franchini. It receives about 5 million visitors annually and is one of the most visited cultural centres in the world.



La Seine Musicale, complex of buildings on the island opened in April 2017, located between Boulogne- Billancourt and Sèvres, in the western suburbs of Paris, on the Seine. A large sail-like curved solar panel provides most of the site's daytime energy needs.

David Hockney

All Images Courtesy of Siddhartha Das

Two months ago, while in Paris, I went to see a David Hockney exhibition at the Pompidou Centre, or, as the Parisians call it, Beaubourg. It was a peculiar day, which started with a walk in the Montmartre area to the White Church, the Sacré-Cœur Basilica. My friend and I sat on the steps like a hundred others taking in the picturesque Paris skyline on a sunny summer day. Suddenly, a few plain clothes policemen went running past us chasing a few young men selling drinking water without a license. The spirited chase and the shouting would have made an unsuspecting tourist think they had committed some heinous crime. In a large city, like any other, where many horrific crimes

occur and go unnoticed, the police thought it best to use their time and resources to stop the sale of bottled water to tourists. Strange. An hour later to be seeing brightly coloured paintings of Hockney's in the iconic Richard Rogers-Renzo Piano building was just how it should be.

As we sauntered through the halls to the open spaces, on to an open space with these fluid women in bronze sitting delicately by the water, the madness of the world seemed far away. Birds and people seemed oblivious of each other and in complete harmony sat around, and little children gurgled as they pointed to the sculptures, birds, water and the sky...everything came together.

A week later, I visited the La Seine Musicale, a performing arts centre with a jaw-dropping concert hall located on the Île Seguin Island by the Seine River in the south-western suburbs of Paris. Designed by the architectural team of Shigeru Ban and Jean de Gastines, it looks like a shiny disco ball fell from the sky on to the Seine. While sitting in the slightly squat sphere and listening to the concert, I closed my eyes and all the beauty I witnessed over the past couple of weeks went through my mind's eye. There was no place for the violence. It was simple and beautiful. And the birds with families by the bronze figures in water came back to me with music.