

[Features](#) » [Metroplus](#)

The many shades of reality

ESTHER ELIAS



Art questions: Sabine says she looks for different perspectives on time

Special Arrangement

Berlin-based photographer and sculptor Sabine Hornig's India project will combine images of globalisation, waste and textiles

Sabine Hornig loves a good illusion. As a photographer, she bends a medium known to capture immediate reality into one that makes the viewer question his understanding of time. As a sculptor, she creates structures that make the viewer question his place in space. “It is pluralism that interests me,” she says. “Is what we see and experience, really what we think it is?” she asks. The Berlin-based artist is in India, first in Bangalore as an artist sponsored by the Goethe Institute, and now in Kochi as a participant of the ongoing Pepper House Residency by Kochi Biennale Foundation.

A good entry point into Sabine’s work is her most recent piece ‘Double Transparency’, a photo-sculpture displayed in Rotterdam which spanned the length and breadth of an entire gallery. Wooden frames made for walls over which sheer fabric, upon which Sabine had printed her photographs, was stretched to create a room-like structure that one could walk into. Many of the photographs chosen were from Sabine’s past archive of documenting the glass store-fronts of abandoned shops in Berlin. The picture series captured reflections of street life blending with the actual objects within the store. The resultant effect of ‘Double Transparency’ is of looking at the room’s walls from an outsider’s perspective, while one actually is within the structure. And the sheer fabric meant that one could vaguely see through the room thus unsure of whether objects and people in the images were real, shadows, or illusions.

At the close of Sabine’s India sojourn, she hopes to create a similar structure, this time with narratives of urbanisation and globalisation that she has captured from here. “In Europe, we have an information overlay with simultaneous perspectives bombarding us continuously. In India, I see different versions of time co-existing, historic remnants with global ideas.” In Kochi, her time has been spent photographing modern high-rise architecture that sits alongside traditional houses, as well as present-day Indian architecture that has influences of colonial building styles. “There are sudden shifts in perspective, both literally across the skyline and metaphorically through time,” she observes. In between though, are projects left half-done, much like the Berlin store-fronts, or even completed, unoccupied buildings, now overgrown with creepers. “It’s like progress has frozen over suddenly.”

Across the world, one of the classic images of globalisation Sabine has photographed has been at waste dumps. At an electronic waste site in Europe, she photographed climbing piles of discarded computers. “In our time, at places like Muziris, we’re digging up what ancestors have left us. Electronic waste, which is where our civilisation ends, is what the future will find of us,” she says. This is also symbolic of how globalisation lets go of individual identity. Much like electronic waste the world-over looks the same, Sabine notes that architectural elements such as concrete are the same globally too. To indicate this sameness, Sabine uses stand-alone hollowed-out concrete blocks in several of her installations. The solidity of the concrete is contrasted by the fluidity of the polyester fabric her photographs are printed on.

Until Sabine’s India visit, she says the fabric was just a technical means to communicate the idea of transparency, and

reality as temporal. At Bangalore, she visited Ramnagar's silk handlooms and discovered a rather serendipitous connection—a silk scarf on which she had printed her image of electronic waste turned out to have been woven in India. This led her to explore the human side to the production story behind fabric in India, both in silk and cotton. The tradition-modernity continuum of architecture extends here too with mechanised looms overtaking hand-crafted fabric, and in the contrast between poor handloom weavers and opulent silk shop advertisements across Kochi's hoardings.

Sabine has also photographed in Kochi the recycling of discarded plastic bottles into nylon threads for clothing. This new connection between globalisation, waste and fabric has added a unique-to-India dimension to her project, she says. All these ideas will come together as images in Sabine's final installation, which she hopes to print, this time, in Indian translucent silk, not polyester. Through her time in India, she also found children asking to be photographed by her on the streets, leading to an unexpected series of portraits. But these unplanned ideas are what often make her work. She says: "It's all a part of gathering different perspectives of both time and change."

Sabine Hornig will deliver a lecture about her art practice at Pepper House on May 02 at 5.00 p.m

Keywords: [Sabine Hornig](#), [photography](#), [sculpture](#)