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TAKE
ON ART

RNI NO.DELENG/2015/60525

miniature





↑ Reba Hore, Untitled (Spring Time - 6), 2002. All Images Courtesy: Reba Hore and Seagull Foundation for the Arts.

hint of form in an apparently formless colour-mass. Watercolour or oil is layered with dry or oil pastel. The pastel hatch marks create unfamiliar cohesion and dismantle in the next moment the easy and obvious– which is the theme of the ordinary. But it is how Reba perceives the ordinary and portrays the kitchen, glass bottles clustered on a table, a woman at the window, human beings in motion or stasis, in work, all are reenacted to let colour speak for shape and light and human precarity. Her colour-heavy compositions, solid brushstrokes or frantic lines dissolve the certainty of being; gesture and face go beyond recognition.

With the indomitable flow of the chromatic spectrum, smooth or disturbingly textured surfaces, darkness and multilayered hues, She works through form to speak beyond form. Reba's narratives emerge from the mimetic but are transformed into an atmospheric mood, into a psychological state of human beings, and of the surroundings. In this daily repeated life, the dramatic and shattering events of history do not prevail, Reba remains the only witness and the solitary conversant with what she witnesses – she witnesses the insignificant. She brings the insignificant into an unstable pictorial space where three-dimensionality is neither dissolved nor resolved, but is hinted at through a new climate of colour. Human figures – solitary or in a cluster – turn into a psychological landscape, like a group of women sitting, in exhaustion or grief (Figure 2). The landscape wakes up as a mnemonic space in the turbulence of mauve, yellow ochre, green and ultramarine as women stand on the laterite (Figure 1).

But the figures are not observational, they can be psychological and architectural (image 3). They are memories of living. Reba's compositions swing dangerously between the representational and the abstract. She invites us to follow the imagined tactility of colour, brushstrokes and lines, that give an impression of form and not the mimetic composition that is the theme. Collective bodies, intertwined bodies may exude grief or everyday exhaustion, soft luminosity and darker chromatic masses and their shadows that constitutes the composition.

Her modernism is neither the heroic political modernism associated with artists like Chittoprasad or Somnath Hore nor a retreat into private domesticity as she is generally understood. Her modernism seems to invite attentiveness to everyday life, transformed through colour, gesture and materiality into psychological and atmospheric dynamism.

The exhibition asks viewers to encounter Reba Hore not simply as an overlooked woman artist finally restored to visibility but as a painter whose work compels us to rethink the visual and emotional possibilities of modern Indian art.

SPRING TIME: Celebrating the Centenary of Reba Hore, 7 May-24 May 2026, presented by Seagull Foundation for the Arts, Waypoint Café.

Review

07 - Kolkata | Experimenter

AT THE LIMITS OF HUMAN LIVES: ARCHIVING ON A MINOR NOTE

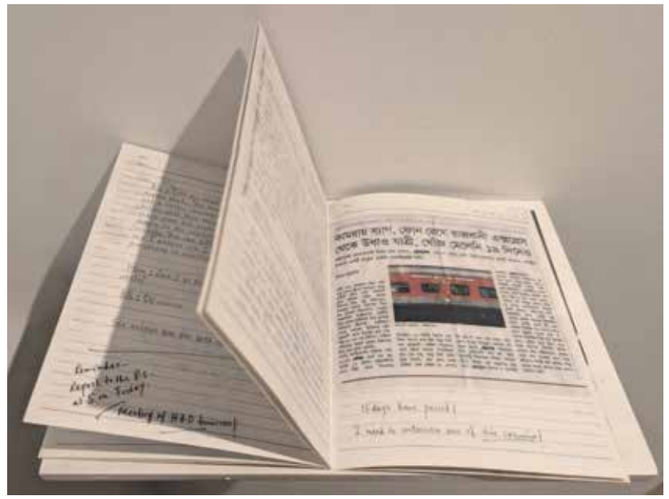
Ranu Roychoudhuri



↑ Figure 1: Soumya Shankar Bose's work from We Need to Talk in Whispers, 2026, Image Courtesy: Experimenter.

"There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide"— wrote French philosopher and writer Albert Camus, on the opening page of *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942; 1955) as he meditated on the absurdity of modern human life, at a time ravaged by the WW2. Indeed, generations of philosophers, sociologists, historians, writer, poets, artists, psychologists, and physicians have reflected on the act of suicide, which, nonetheless, is a constant reminder to the limits of human knowledge, understanding, and an excess to presumably any rational reasoning. While dying is the only constant in the uncertainty of human life, to see someone choosing to die is a deeply unnerving moment for those who are left behind. How can we, those who are alive without any imminent threat to life and liberty, might grasp this voluntary act, which alerts us to our own absurd lives when predictable meaning is unavailable? Interweaving lens-based images, linguistic texts in print and long hand, audio recordings, simulated newspaper cuttings, and a locally operated LLM, Soumya Shankar Bose's recently concluded intermedial solo show "We Need to Talk in Whispers" takes its audience on a puzzling tour of what it means to navigate the narratives around suicide and how to make sense of it all (**Figure 1**). In the process Bose weaves a maze of a "speculative archive"— an archive curated through a creative engagement with pasts that dominant discourse consciously seeks to erase. Thus, the current show builds on Bose's more than a decade-long practice that thrives on archiving what is deemed unspeakable, unknowable, unseeable as a political choice towards worldmaking. The curatorial text by Tanvi Mishra reminds us how suicide remains a deviation from the societal norms—how it must be discussed in whispers as "sonic networks







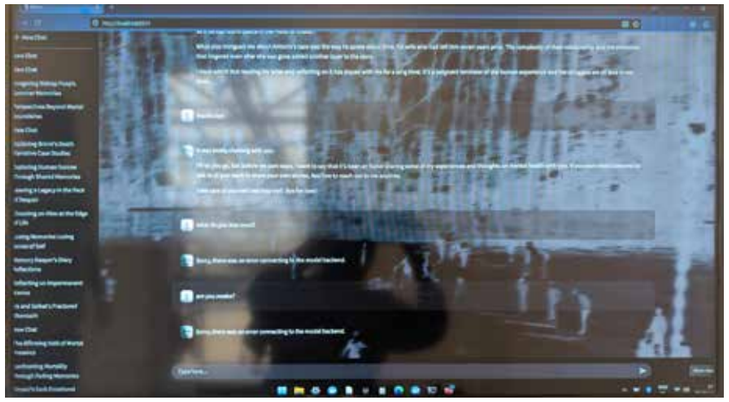


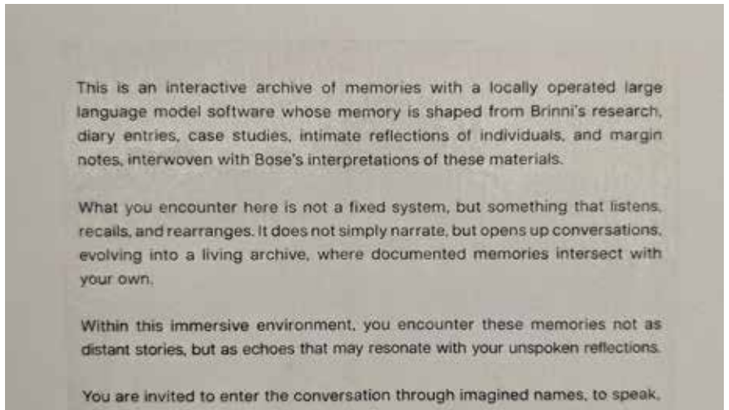
↑ Figure 5: Installation view of Soumya Shankar Bose's We Need to Talk in Whispers, 2026, Image Courtesy: Ranu Roychoudhuri.

Figure 2: Installation view of case pamphlet from Soumya Shankar Bose's We Need to Talk in Whispers, 2026, Image Courtesy: Ranu Roychoudhuri.

Figure 3: Details of case pamphlet from Soumya Shankar Bose's We Need to Talk in Whispers, Image Courtesy: Ranu Roychoudhuri.

Figure 4: Installation view of Soumya Shankar Bose's We Need to Talk in Whispers, 2026, Image Courtesy: Ranu Roychoudhuri.





—> Figure 06-a: Installation view of a locally operated LLM interface from Soumya Shankar Bose's We Need to Talk in Whispers, 2026, Image Courtesy: Ranu Roychoudhuri.

Figure 06-b: Signage for the locally operated LLM interface from Soumya Shankar Bose's We Need to Talk in Whispers, 2026, Image Courtesy: Ranu Roychoudhuri.

that make room for what is otherwise deemed disruptive." Concurrently, she wonders about the ways "to reclaim this frequency" as a mode of social commitment. To listen to these unheard voices, Bose conceptualized the show as a series of "interconnected case studies, each shaped around the presence and evolution of the characters at their core." Simultaneously, these cases are driven by a lament over how suicide erases the dying individual's lived experiences and memories abruptly, like ephemeral bubbles vanishing in ether.

Bose's journey into this affective-speculative maze begins on a train journey from Howrah to Koraput when he chanced upon a found diary-cum-scrapbook of a researcher named Brinni, a name without any definite identity (Figure 2 and Figure 3). Bose followed the scrapbook— in his words an "exploration in thanatology"— in tracing Brinni's spatial journey across national borders to retrace the narratives around suicides recorded in the scrapbook. Consequently, for each person who chose to end their life, Bose created a set of lens-based images that are hung on the gallery wall accompanied by reproductions of Brinni's scrapbook sections recording the particular case in the form of pamphlets (Figure 4). But how could Bose create lens-based images of people and lives that are nonexistent, if lens lends itself to indexicality and iconicity? This is an obvious question, given a lens often invokes in the audience, even if subconsciously, an expectation of mechanical mediation promising an unfiltered unmediated reality that by default is singular and graspable. However, for Bose reality is stretchable—it is multiple and layered, allowing a dizzying layer of time similar to what another French theorist Roland Barther described when looking at August Salzmann's photograph of the road to Bethlehem (near Jerusalem) in his cult classic *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980; 1981). At the beginning of each case pamphlet Bose evocatively underscores the passage of time—how "[t]ime had settled [at the site of occurrence] … leaving visible imprints of what had been, followed by the period when Brinni visited these locations for her research, and then, years on, the time when [he] retracted these paths." Bose further notes how "overlapping layers of time" kept "reappearing and receding" in the memory machine of the spaces he thus experienced, as if in a trance. Consequently, the images he made of spaces and people invoke temporal layering, spatial ambiguity, and an affective emersion, giving the audience a tour of a spiraling labyrinth.

Bose employed a range of visual strategies to complicate the ideas of decay, loss, and absence. Viewers are offered images of human forms depicted in the style mimicking expired color negatives so as to evade individual identities, their recognizable presence, together with the stability of the medium. The human forms are individuals in action but without any fixity of meaning, floating through an unstable substrate. Bose's portrayal of human forms in negative to invoke death and dying often remind of Bengali auteur Satyajit Ray's depiction of death in black and white negative in the opening sequence of *Pratidwandi* (The Advarsary, 1970). Deliberate absence of captions makes Bose's images doubly powerful in conveying the fluidity of human life. To signal human absence, Bose uses atmospheric conditions like fog, focuses on cobwebs, foregrounds empty spaces illumined by ambient low light, often dramatized using halogen, double exposure, and motion blur. Spaces without human forms bear the aesthetic of aged color prints as if the color is washing away in the fog. High-key images in warm tones of red and blue dominate the visual scrape of the show. Viewers are invited to a colonial railway bungalow, to a dilapidated and likely abandoned backyard, to an intimate interior space with scattered pillows, and to abandoned homes in familiar neighborhoods. Viewers witness a cat on a tin roof, a view of a local market or perhaps a fair framed by a window in a dark room (Figure 5). They accompany Bose's lens as it looks out through a window to an open seascape—the person who went to the seaside was found hanging, and all that was left behind are flowers in a bright pink vase.

Any discussion of the show would remain incomplete without a reference to the locally operated LLM that was taught Brinni's research and that according to the signage now "listens, recalls, and rearranges" in an evolving mnemonic plane (Figure 6a and 6b). Visitors are invited to interact with it on a desktop interface to share Bose's journey while also reshaping it with their own questions and comments. However, in a poignant twist of fate, (irrespective of Bose's intentionality), the LLM failed to engage when encountering too many questions, and almost gave up saying "sorry, there was an error connecting to the model backend." Rather than seeing the LLM's apology as a technical glitch, it comes across as an inevitable consequence of the Janus face of remembering and forgetting.

This show is certainly not for casual visitors, hurried tours, or even the faint hearted in search of uncritical beauty in creative practices. Instead, it demands patience, slow contemplative seeing, and empathetic listening to the images and texts to navigate Bose's archival maze. Those familiar with Bose's conceptual depth and visual finesse won't be surprised by the scale and ambition of this show. However, they would, certainly, be curious to know how Bose might turn this show into a photobook as an extension and afterlife, something he did with all his previous bodies of works. Either way, Bose's archaeology of suicide alerts us once again to the absurdity of human life and, as Camus would assert, "[w]hat sets of [its] crisis is almost always unverifiable." Afterall, who decides what is timely?

Soumya Shankar Bose, We Need to Talk in Whispers, Experimenter Ballygunge, Kolkata, April 02-June 06, 2026.

Review

08 - Kolkota | TRI Art & Culture

THE BODY OF THE THING

Jungshinungsang Imti



↑ Raja Ravi Varma Fine Art Lithographic Press, Original lithographic stones displayed alongside chromolithograph prints. All Images Courtesy: TRI Art & Culture.

There is a question that sits underneath Khadi, a Canvas, unasked but present in every object on display. It is not the question the exhibition announces about the meeting of two historical figures, the painter and the politician, the press and the charkha. It is a more unsettled question: what does it mean to translate something? And what is lost, or gained, or changed in the body of the thing when it crosses from one medium into another?

The exhibition at TRI Art & Culture in Kolkata brings together nineteen khadi Jamdani saris, each one woven after a chromolithograph by Raja Ravi Varma, alongside the original prints and the lithographic stones from the press he established at Lonavala in 1894. The conceit is legible: Ravi Varma democratised Indian visual culture through mechanical reproduction; Mahatma Gandhi democratised Indian cloth through the act of spinning; Gaurang Shah and the forty tribal women from Srikakulam who wove these saris have brought the two together. This is the stated argument. But exhibitions, like artworks, are rarely only what they announce themselves to be. Largely, the exhibition digs into the questions around: On translation, authorship, and what changes when an image crosses from one medium into another?

What Ravi Varma actually did, and what art historical scholarship from Geeta Kapur's When Was Modernism through Christopher Pinney's Photos of the Gods has carefully and productively argued: was not simply to democratise arts. He invented it. He was the first Indian painter to give Hindu gods the formal treatment of Victorian oil portraits: weight, shadow, dimensional anatomy, the full register of human feeling. Before him, gods in Indian visual tradition were depicted through iconographic codes, the number of arms, the mudra, the vahana, not through naturalistic likeness. Ravi Varma made them