

ENTERTAINMENT

What Artist Anita Dube, First Woman Curator Of Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Has In Mind For The Next Edition

The relationship between art and politics.

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Artist Anita Dube (right).

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB), an international exhibition of contemporary art held in Kerala, is finally going to have a woman curating its next edition in 2018, after five years and three editions since it began in 2012.

On the last day of KMB 2016, artist Anita Dube was named as the successor to Sudarshan Shetty, who had curated the latest edition of the months-long spectacle. In an interview shortly afterwards, Dube claimed she was "[pleasantly surprised](#)" by the announcement. So must be many in the world of art.

Except for a few influential critics, such as Geeta Kapur or Alka Pande, the landscape of Indian art is oddly bereft of female curators. While women aren't exactly invisible in the scene, their presence could be much stronger. "There's so much more to be done for the visibility of women artists," Dube told HuffPost India on the phone. "Positions of power are not necessarily in the hands of women anyway."

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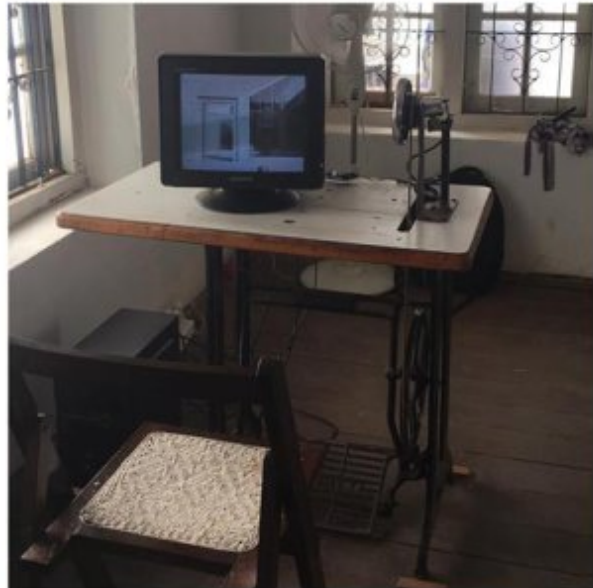
Dube's appointment to the role not only addresses the conspicuous absence of a woman curator at the KMB but is also a piece with the nature of her practice.

Acutely cerebral, boldly polemical and resonating with social messages, her art is a vehicle for her politics, though not divested of its sensual or visual underpinnings. It may be too early to talk about her vision for the next biennale, but this much is clear to Dube: "I want to explore the vexed question of the relationship between art and politics," she says, "as well as the possibilities of a non-alienated life."

The formulation may sound complex, but the impulse at its core is intensely human: how to step beyond the exhibition model and create art that forges the sense of a community?

"A lot of the time people don't feel they are active participants in high culture," says Dube. "There's often something oppressive about it." It is this gap between high and pop cultures, between seeing and feeling, that Dube wants to address in her conception of the biennale.

A similar intention was palpable in the latest edition of the biennale too, in Shetty's grand vision of music, poetry, dance and drama converging with the visual arts to create an incredible synergy with the audience.



ME
Exhibits at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2016.

Close to a hundred artists came together from 31 countries to forge a dialogue between the plastic and the performative arts. The narratives they spun ranged from the intimately local, showcasing the customs and cultural practices of the South, to

big global questions like the Syrian refugee crisis. Given the multiplicity of Dube's visual idiom, one expects her offering to be no less richly-varied and resonant at several levels.

Dube's work, which straddles sculpture, installation, photography and performance, can be wistfully poetic as well as stridently tactile. A conglomerate of words, or simply one striking utterance ("Wound", "Silence", "Woman"), can assume a potency enough to transfix the viewer. The affinities are as visual, psychological, intensely personal; the trigger always a powerful idea that drives the composition to its destiny.

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Initially trained in art history, Dube stepped over to the other side to begin her practice in her 30s. It was a decidedly risky move, fraught with uncertainties. The pursuit of creativity doesn't ensure a solvent career, but her association with Indian Radical Painters' and Sculptors' Association, which advocated the social and political consequences of art, was inspiring.

In 1997, she became one of the co-founders of the now-famous KHOJ collective in New Delhi, a platform which promotes south

Asian art in a global context. In the last decade, Dube's work has travelled to the far shores — to Europe, America and other Asian countries.

"I'll have to follow my subjectivity and draw on the kinds of work I do as an artist," says Dube when asked about her sense of what the next biennale may look like. "While I hope to bring in more work by women — in general, by artists from the margins — I don't want to be tokenistic about it."

The inclusion of any work in the KMB, Dube says, will ultimately have to be built into its overall structure. "I want to focus on particular works, which have a certain power and affect, not on the number of artists I can include," she adds.

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