

ARTFORUM

Ranbir Kaleka
VOLTE GALLERY
2/19 Kamal Mansion
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Ranbir Kaleka, *Cul-De-Sac in Taxila*, 2010, still from a single-channel HD video projection on a painted canvas, 3 minutes 55 seconds.

Delhi-based Ranbir Kaleka's first solo show in Mumbai includes a number of bewitching installations, from older video pieces, like the grainily poetic *Man with Cockerel*, 2001–2002, to newer ones, such as *Cul-De-Sac in Taxila*, 2010, in which a white horse magically appears when a man waves a hammer. The whimsicality of the exhibition, "Sweet Unease," draws upon Kaleka's childhood in a village in Patiala, Punjab. The recalcitrant rooster seen in *Man with Cockerel* was inspired by the macho beasts Kaleka witnessed in rural cockfights. In the video, a man holds a struggling cockerel in his arms while standing in a silvery pool of water. Finally, the cock (pun intended) dashes away, while the man and his reflection dissolve in swathes of gray mist. A similar mind-body struggle is represented in *Wrestlers*, 2010, a video that alludes to rustic wrestling troops, in which two identical men indulge in a sweaty brawl that could be mistaken for violent lovemaking.

These works' tongue-in-cheek humor notwithstanding, the veteran artist's "video-paintings" possess a technical sophistication that is impossible to overlook. They incorporate elements from cinema and painting, becoming—to quote Kaleka—"something in between." Fables from the *House of Ibaan*, 2007, is a black and gray painting of a solitary man seated by a table. The canvas rests on an easel. Slowly, images are projected onto it, allowing new characters to enter the frame: A young woman materializes behind the man; she fills an empty crystal jug with milk. Meanwhile, a small boy opens a door onto a field of golden grass. Eventually, the technicolored figures disappear, leaving the man alone in his cavernous house. Do the apparitions represent figments of the protagonist's imagination—memories from his past, or even perhaps from Kaleka's own? Whether Kaleka is making fun of Bollywood's conjuring tricks or using its hyperreal style to indulge his own fancies is never quite clear. Where does recollection end and fiction begin?

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