

Ranbir Kaleka at Bose Pacia Gallery

Since transitioning from painting to video in the 1990s, Ranbir Kaleka has used video as a tool for material innovation. His installation at Bose Pacia demonstrates his capacity for moving easily between media and genre, *Crossings* (2005), a four-channel video projected over painted panels, is the most ambitious of the three works on display. First shown at the Venice Biennale in the "iCon: India Contemporary" pavilion (2005), *Crossings* is a 15-minute loop of inter-related images that give evidence to Kaleka's confidence in painting's ability to incorporate, but not be subsumed by, video. *Crossings* is based on a script Kaleka wrote about a Sikh man and his turban. The cultural and social symbol of the turban guides the momentum of the narrative as he dyes, ties and finally puts on the turban.



Ranbir Kaleka ■ Still from *Man with Cockerel* ■ 2002 ■ 19-second video loop ■ Video installation with two LCD projectors in black-and-white, projected onto board ■ Dimensions variable ■ Courtesy Bose Pacia Gallery

Throughout the video, the color of the turban morphs into vibrant forms, triggering the character's move through natural and built environments. The concern with migration manifests a complex examination of progress and motion as visual qualities wherein the painted portions of the panels are revealed by tonal shifts in the video and by intermittent blank screens. At times the projected image is in soft focus; in other sections, the colors and image provide a sharp contrast to the background. In addition to painting the screens, Kaleka imbues the video with a painterly quality, which is in dialogue with traditional landscape and portrait painting. Another video installation, *Man Threading a Needle* (1999), is rendered through a similar process. Here, Kaleka substitutes acrylic for oil paint and uses a board spot-lit by a projecting to study a carpenter at work, while resuscitating the energetic colors and brushwork of Neo-expressionist painting from the 1980's.

The most compelling of the three installations is *Man with Cockerel* (2002). Shot in black and white in a 19-second loop, it is a tightly focused sequence of a man and his reflection entering and re-entering the projection's foreground while holding a bird. The composure of his movement is in radical juxtaposition to the frustrated, struggling bird. Executed without sound and projected in a narrow, vertical space, it is eerie and jarring; the effect is further enhanced by the grainy surface quality of the projection. In this, as in the other works, Kaleka maneuvers through space, surface and tone in an effort to challenge, but not subvert the

medium. His method suggests that painting, which would have required attention to the possibilities and limits of the canvas, informs his approach to video as ground for infinite experimentation.

- COURTNEY MARTIN