



installation still
MAN THREADING A NEEDLE 1998/1999
 Single channel video projected on 59 x 91 cm, (23.3 x 35.8 inch) oil painting. 6 minute loop with sound



MAN WITH COCKEREL 2001-02
 2 channel video, 19 minute loop

Inside the Black Box: images caught in a beam (*excerpt*)
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by Geeta Kapur

This excerpt was included in a talk by Geeta Kapur on video and light-based installations at School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi on 10th November 2005. This was part of a lecture series by Geeta Kapur who was a Visiting Professorial Fellow at the School in 2005.

The use of the digital medium allows Ranbir Kaleka to achieve a transparency, a spectral quality, where the (male) character/person/body is both present and absent, reducible to a pixel puzzle and conjured as a simulacrum -- a copy of that which does not exist in material terms or just enough to throw a shadow and create a contemplative moment of identification. A video image of a pockmarked man in a vest threading a needle (*Man Threading Needle*, 1998) is beamed on a framed painting of the same man; the live image and the still painting fuse; the soundtrack picks up the hoot of a train, the cry of a summer peacock, the threading fails. The six-minute loop with an image that is neither still nor moving achieves in its failed action a subliminal existence.

A bald man with a placid, Buddha-like face, clutching and letting go then clutching and letting go a plumed fowl (*Man with Cockerel*, 2001): this rhythmically repeated, soft-gray image offers a tantalizing grasp of desire, an allegory on dispossession. Kaleka's subject-matter is representational and yet, by the form and brevity of its videoed avatar, by a trick of durational fallacy, by sheer transience, it erases its signified meaning. The imaged body -- at the brink of dissolution and disappearance -- reads like an index of mortality. Its quotidian identity is subordinated to a fragile sense of being where no assertion, no action is necessary except that which trusts in a minimal continuum of survival. The language of representation enters the liminal zone and the encounter, sanguine, serene, evanescent, resembles a haiku where the hypothesis offered about a lived life needs no backing of proof.