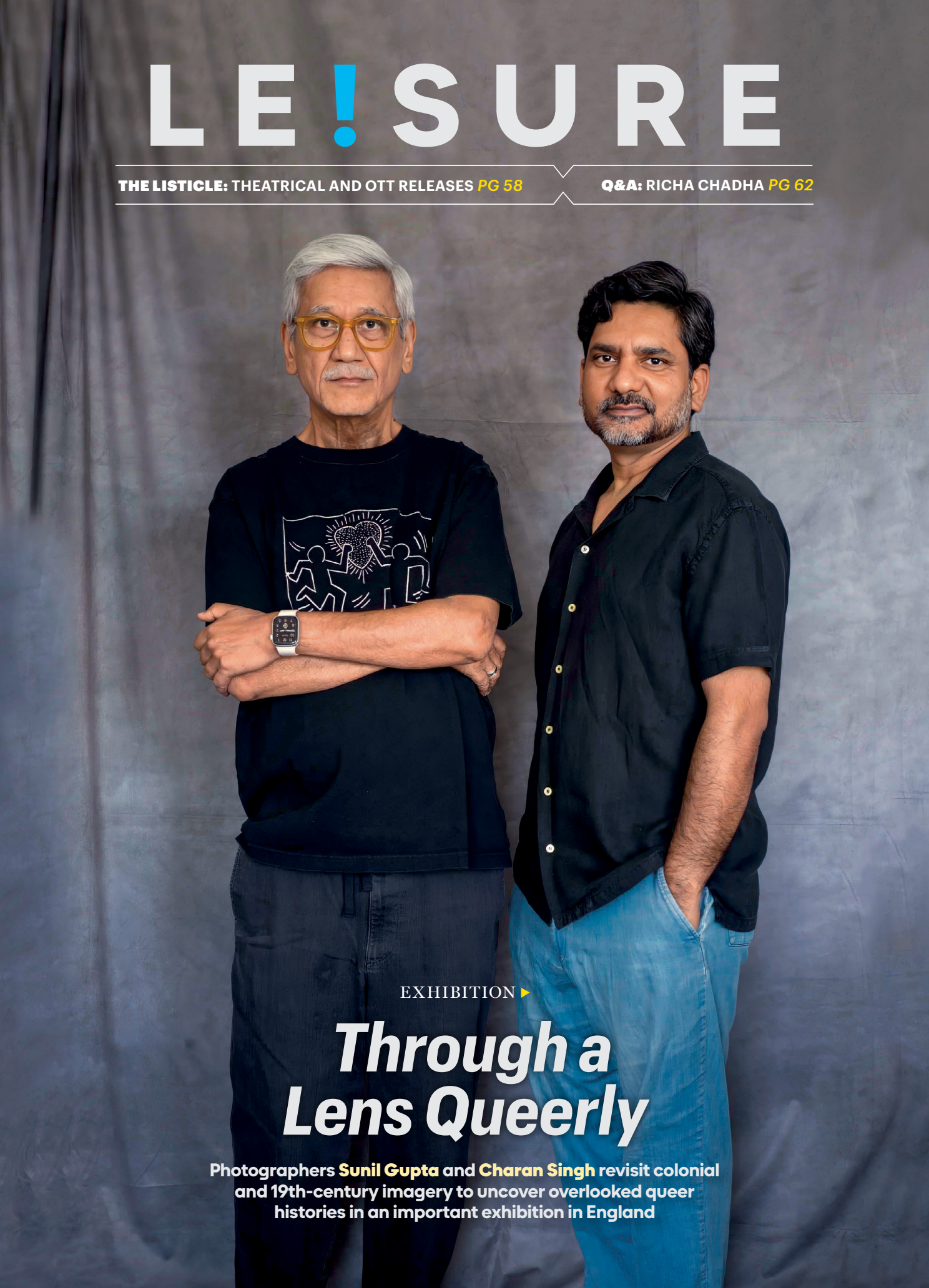
LE!SURE

THE LISTICLE: THEATRICAL AND OTT RELEASES *PG 58*

Q&A: RICHA CHADHA *PG 62*



EXHIBITION ▸

Through a Lens Queerly

Photographers Sunil Gupta and Charan Singh revisit colonial and 19th-century imagery to uncover overlooked queer histories in an important exhibition in England

There is a striking symmetry: **GUPTA RE-INTERPRETS THE PRE-RAPHAELITES** in India and Singh reconstructs Company art in Britain

OTHER TALES Sunil Gupta's artwork at the Leamington Spa art gallery; below, the exhibition brochure

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS ENTER a museum collection and begin asking questions of its silences? This is the premise of *Unruly Desires: Reframing the Past*, an exhibition at Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum in Warwickshire, England, that brings together the works of Sunil Gupta and Charan Singh. Partners in both life and art, the two photographers engage with the museum's collection to explore queer identity, beauty, desire and visibility, revealing histories overlooked within traditional art historical narratives.

On view until September 6, the exhibition places Gupta's *The New Pre-Raphaelites* series alongside Singh's ongoing *The Promise of Beauty* project and newly commissioned works responding directly to objects in the museum's collection. Although their approaches differ, both artists are interested in how historical images can be reimagined through contemporary queer perspectives.

For Gupta, *The New Pre-Raphaelites* captures a pivotal moment in India's LGBTQ+ history. Created in 2008 during the legal challenge to Section 377 of the then Indian Penal Code, the series reinterpreted Pre-Raphaelite paintings through photographs of friends and activists in Delhi. Looking back, Gupta now sees the works as documents of a generation demanding change. "In the mid-2000s, the atmosphere had radically changed," he recalls. "Talk and discussion spilled out from campuses into the city and young people wanted change now. It was a moment I recognised from the work of the Pre-Raphaelites in England."

The series also reflects Gupta's experience of migration. Born in New Delhi and later moving to Canada and Britain, he has described his work as being shaped by both geographical movement and the journey towards a gay identity. "The collision of my western art and gay liberation training with the young queer activists in Delhi who were emerging from graduate school led to the creation of the photographs in this show," he explains.

That dialogue becomes especially visible in the exhibition itself, where Gupta's photographs are shown alongside works from the museum's collection, including Simeon Solomon's 'Sleepers and One that Waketh'. "There's a hidden queer history here for England and British people themselves," says Gupta. "It means a local audience can see the connection between Britain and India, so it's not just something happening in Delhi but of interest over here too."

Questions of visibility also run through Charan Singh's *The Promise of Beauty*, a series inspired by East India Company art. Through carefully staged self-portraits, Singh reimagines figures who were often reduced to occupational types within colonial imagery, restoring a sense of individuality. "I started with a question: does beauty belong to everyone?" says Singh. "What struck me about the Company paintings was how they were produced with often an isolated subject described by their profession, reducing them to utilitarian objects."

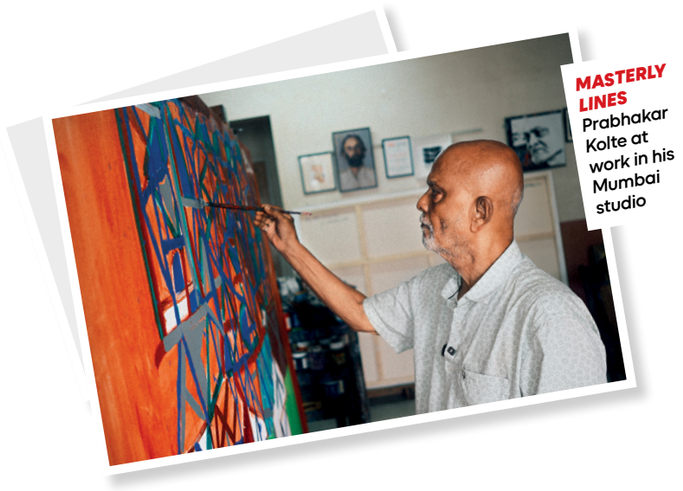
For Singh, beauty is not a neutral concept but one shaped by systems of power. His photographs challenge colonial ways of seeing while creating space for alternative forms of representation. His practice is also informed by what he describes as his "pre-English language" life, a perspective that allows him to question dominant narratives surrounding queer identity. "Returning to my pre-English language life is a way of returning home," he says. "Much of what circulates globally as queer identity is shaped by English-language narratives. While it is an important tool, it can often flatten the complexity of other cultural experiences."

Together, Gupta and Singh demonstrate how contemporary artists can transform the way we encounter museum collections. Both draw inspiration from 19th-century visual culture while centring queer Indian subjects who have often been absent from those histories. As Singh observes, there is a striking symmetry between the two bodies of work: Gupta reinterprets the Pre-Raphaelites in India, while Singh reconstructs Company paintings in Britain.

The result is an exhibition that challenges the boundaries between archive and imagination, past and present. Rather than treating historical collections as fixed records, *Unruly Desires: Reframing the Past* reveals them as spaces where new stories can emerge and established narratives can be reconsidered. ■

—Nikhil Sardana

The exhibition is on at Leamington Spa Art Gallery & Museum, Warwickshire, England, till Sept. 6



MASTERLY LINES Prabhakar Kolte at work in his Mumbai studio

ART ▼

ABSTRACT INSTINCT

A MUMBAI EXHIBITION PRESENTS RECENT WORKS BY **PRABHAKAR KOLTE** ALONGSIDE ARCHIVAL NOTES, CHARTING THE EVOLUTION OF HIS PRACTICE

Known for his masterful use of colour, space and form, Prabhakar Kolte is one of India's key abstract artists. His latest works are now on view at Chemould Prescott Road in Mumbai. Apart from artwork, *Asymmetrical Synthesis* also includes writings, poems, lectures and videos that reveal the intuitive thinking behind Kolte's artistic process. Walking around the gallery, Kolte's voice percolates through readings from the *Dnyaneshwari* and recordings of his conversations with students. As voices and sounds intermingle, the paintings reveal their own rhythm—drips of paint that bind, build, erase, fill and form. Each canvas captures a fluid sequence of gestures, reflecting Kolte's belief in painting as an evolving process shaped by intuition, movement and continual discovery.

KOLTE'S ART UNFOLDS THROUGH COLOUR, GESTURE AND AN EXCHANGE BETWEEN THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE

Kolte taught for many years at the Sir J.J. School of Art and counts among his students prominent contemporary artists, including Jitish Kallat, Atul Dodiya, Bose Krishnamachari and Sudarshan Shetty. For Kolte, painting is an ongoing process. Guided by the rhythms of nature, his works resist conventional readings, unfolding instead through colour, gesture and a negotiation between the visible and the invisible.

Curated by Jesal Thacker, the exhibition explores the idea of 'asymmetrical synthesis', a state where contradiction, chance and intuition coexist without seeking balance or resolution. Borrowing from the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the concept reflects Kolte's approach to painting as an open-ended process. Rather than pursuing harmony, the works embrace uncertainty, allowing disparate elements to exist in a dynamic and continually evolving relationship. ■

—Prachi Joshi

The exhibition is on view at Chemould Prescott Road till Aug. 29