

curator's note

Avani Tandon Vieira

In *For Space*, the geographer Doreen Massey offers provocatively: "a map of a geography is no more than geography...than a painting of a pipe is a pipe". By setting the cartographic object alongside the art object, Massey is gesturing at the fundamentally creative nature of image-making, whether artistic or documentary.

In the contemporary world, and in India in particular, the role of the map is both quotidian and extraordinary. For a nation born of cartographic separation, and one that has survived many remakings, the project of knowing and seeing space is paramount. Equally, it is vulnerable to lapses. What the map makes known is known. What it chooses not to know disappears, through violence or time.

begin at the end of the map asks a simple question - what would we see if we looked beyond the limits of the map as we know it? The works in this exhibition answer this question through a framework encompassing ecology, language, and documentary practice. Speaking from a variety of disciplines and mediums, they show us that in India, life is often lived in the gaps between representation and reality, the map and experience. As our cities grow denser, informal settlements of tarpaulin spring up. At the hard edges of our borders, communities trade livestock and language. In our forests and valleys, a fragile landscape of sound and life exists out of sight.

Against the flatness of the map are thousands of rich, interlinked ways of being. Reclaiming them, through speech, text, and image, is an act of justice. This is the work of the artist, and of the citizen.

Cartography of the Unseen

Swati Janu

The Missing Basti

The Missing Basti is a voluntary, interdisciplinary initiative to archive past and ongoing evictions in under-resourced neighbourhoods in Delhi. Launched in 2020, the project website compiles data from researchers, social activists, and rights-based organisations since the 1990s. It is envisioned as an open access, living archive to which anyone can contribute.

Over the past three decades, there have been over 300 forced evictions in Delhi, most of which went unreported until the Missing Basti archive was formed. The urgent need for action can be felt if we see that there have already been over 100 evictions in the brief three year period since the website was launched. The archive aims to highlight this compounding loss with the hope that the act of bearing witness can lead us to building a city for all. Leveraging the power of maps and data, it supports marginalised communities as they assert their right to the city, questioning the status quo of eviction policies and mobilising action for the prevention of further evictions.

Hand-Stitched Map

As our cities gradually engulf the rural areas around them, a process of spatial violence begins. While fragments of rural communities remain embedded in the city, their practices of food production and habitation are pushed into peripheral spaces. In Delhi, farming and fishing communities have been living on the banks of the Yamuna for decades. Due to the implementation of the Yamuna Riverfront Development Plan, these communities now face the imminent threat of erasure from the heart of the capital. Slowly and violently, they are being forced out of a city whose 'world class' dreams grow bigger by the year.

As part of a year-long engagement 'Peripheries and Crossovers' supported by Khoj Studios, the team at Social Design Collaborative worked with the women farmers on the floodplains of Yamuna Khadar to help create awareness about their invisible role in the city. The farmers came together to produce an incrementally and collectively stitched textile map of their neighbourhood. The map became a storytelling tool, weaving messages to the rest of the city with the personal stories of the women artists, with the river connecting them

all.

The map was first exhibited at a public event organised for two weeks on the floodplains in 2022. Titled 'Chalo Yamuna', the event involved morning walks to the river led by the farmers to urge the residents of Delhi to question what kind of a riverfront they envision for the city. The farmers have, since, been evicted by the Delhi Development Authority. Public parks now occupy the site.

Cyanotype Map

Within the frameworks of top-down urban planning in India, large sections of cities are deemed illegal by planning authorities. As a result, thousands face regular forced evictions from self-built "slums" or unauthorised colonies. The three works in *Cartography of the Unseen* put forth the provocation that the geometry of planning has long been skewed in favour of a few. Such is the story of the Yamuna floodplains, where communities that have been farming, fishing, and herding cattle for decades are being displaced in favour of riverfront development plans.

Developed by Swati Janu at Art Omi residency in New York, this work consists of a blueprint of the Yamuna bank produced using cyanotype print techniques and local flowers. The work seeks to commemorate the riverside villages that have been demolished or are in the process of erasure.

Ikk Kambdi Lakeer/ A Quavering Line

Pahul Singh

Framed as extended shots, *Ikk Kambdi Lakeer/A Quavering Line* documents certain individuals as they speak. The voice is visually re-enacted, as every auditory impediment, every hesitation, is reflected in a quivering line – a boundary, a fracture, a filament, a written expression. The line quivers and shakes in response to the individual's voice, steadfast in its refusal to straighten, and allowing the voice to (re)emerge even during its absence.

In this work, the malleable and volatile lines reference tangible places, particularly the maps of pre-partition territories (the speakers' hometowns). The map remains in a constant flux, responding to the speakers' voices, refusing to settle into a fixed state as long as they speak. A conspicuous absence of sound is juxtaposed with a

palpable anticipation of sound. One waits for the auditory cues in the silence but the anticipation of that is not resolved. We 'hear' through the map as it bears witness to the voice - listening through the trembling line of the map, using both our eyes and ears. This line has various nuances: a line marking a boundary but also a fracture revealing vulnerability.

Sounds of the Western Ghats

Ears to to the Ground

Ears To The Ground seeks to create an awareness of the Western Ghats of India through collective listening. This website is a young exploration of the oldest mountain range in India, through sound. The project began in late 2020, in the Western Ghats of South India, older than the Himalayas and known for its significant biological diversity and endemism. Key to the story were the people the team connected with along the way - coffee growers, artists, farmers, naturalists - who revealed their relationships to the sounds around them, telling stories of how many of those sounds have changed over the years, with some disappearing altogether. These interviews and experiences led to the idea that climate change is something that can actually be heard.

The map, just like this work, has no defined beginning, middle, or end. In using sound as a medium for storytelling, Ears to the Ground is resisting the linearity of words and visual cues, including how we might read or navigate a map. The artists would like to think the medium of sound is not linear and more like a spiral, and it is their intention to bring that same quality to a map. It starts nowhere, it ends nowhere. There is no right or wrong on how to navigate - only perspective.

Reading Room at the end of the map

Texts from the collections of Editions Jojo and Asia Art Archive in India Reading Room

When we think of the intersection of the book and the map, one of the first forms that comes to mind is the atlas. As children, it anchors our geography lessons, condensing the world into adjoining pages of a book. But the atlas, as the project Feral Atlas reminds us, is not merely a collection of maps. Instead, it is an "instruction manual that teaches us how to look at landscapes".

The books in this reading room attend closely to space.

They record urban and rural environments, collect images of human settlements, and explore how our surroundings can be organised and navigated. And yet, they refuse the authority that the atlas possesses. They do not seek to teach us how to look at landscapes, but instead simply invite us into theirs. Each of the books in this curation provides a window into a specific, and valuable space, encouraging us to consider what the world might look like outside the bounds of the familiar. Please take a seat and take your time to browse the selection on offer.

Where is the heart of the city?

Sumedha Chakravarthy and Avani Tandon Vieira

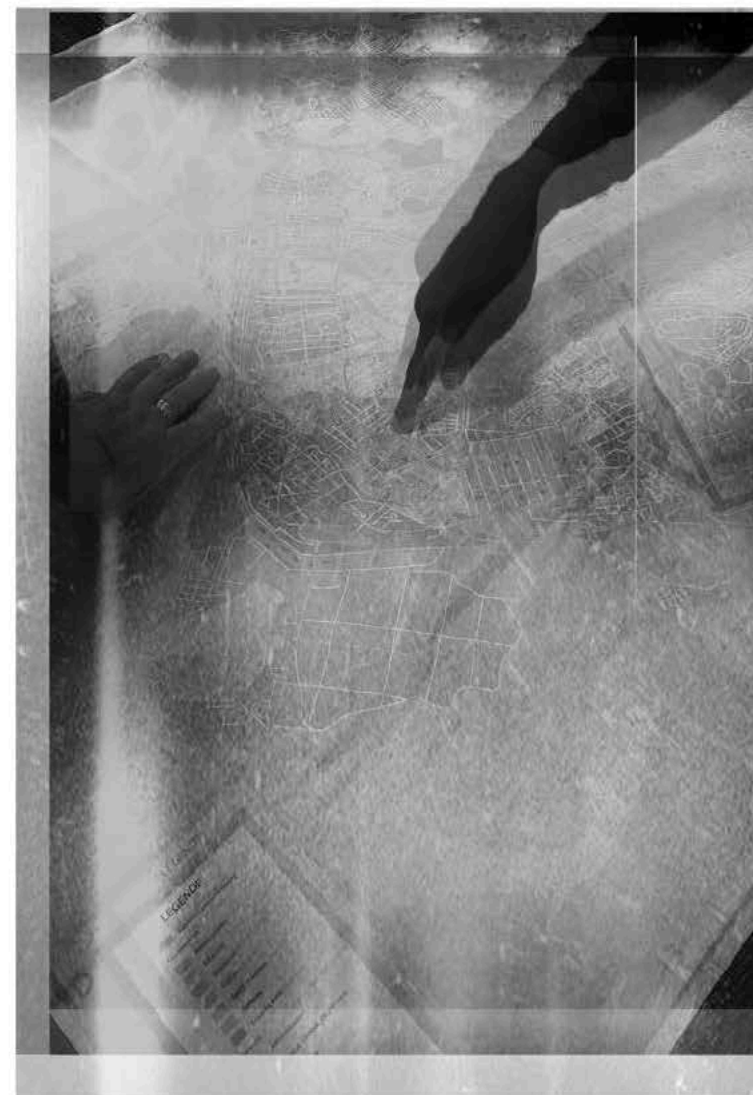
You are currently standing in Central Delhi, the heart of the planned city. Just a few kilometres away are the houses of parliament, India Gate, and Rajpath. In recent years, the government has undertaken a massive project of redevelopment, consecrating the status of this part of the city as its imaginative centre and administrative heart. But what the State sees as central may not be what the everyday resident of the city values most. The heart of the city shifts with time, demographic change, urban planning, and perspective.

Each of us has a deeply personal relationship with the city. We have our own landmarks, our own routes, and our own understandings of where the heart of the city lies. This piece is an invitation: using the stickers provided alongside the map, please mark where the heart of the city - its most important part - lies for you. This could be your current home, or a past one, a place of work, the school or university you went to, your favourite picnic spot, a place that remains foremost in your memories of the city. As we hope this exercise will demonstrate, the city and the map belong to all of us. The heart of the city is where you decide it is.

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begin at the end of the map