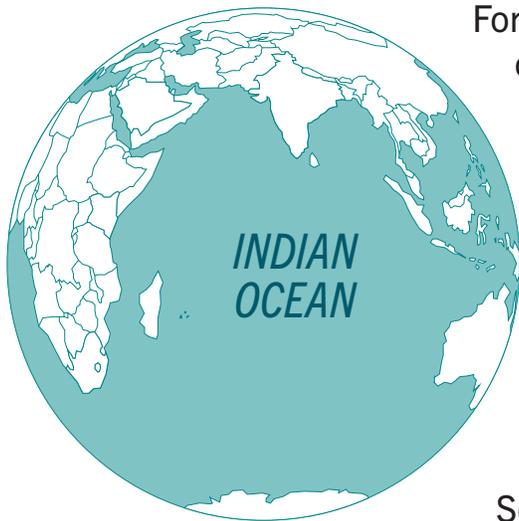


Indian Ocean
CURRENT
SIX ARTISTIC NARRATIVES



For thousands of years humans have plied the waters of the Indian Ocean. From ancient times to the nineteenth century, merchants carried cotton cloth from India to far-flung lands. They returned with cargoes of horses, spices, and precious metals. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, soldiers from East Africa fought in the armies of kings in western and southern India, on occasion becoming rulers in their own right. Islam traveled from its home in the Arabian Peninsula across the Indian Ocean to South and Southeast Asia and for centuries Muslims from these areas have made the journey in reverse in the great pilgrimage to Mecca.

The ocean made all of this possible. For many millennia humans and water have been inextricably linked in the Indian Ocean world.

Indian Ocean Current explores the legacy of this long movement of people, things, and ideas. It showcases the work of six contemporary artists with deep ties to the western half of the Indian Ocean: Shiraz Bayjoo, Shilpa Gupta, Nicholas Hlobo, Wangechi Mutu, Penny Siopis, and Hajra Waheed. Through a variety of media and forms—including paintings, installations, videos, collages, sculptures, and photographs—these artists grapple with the past, present, and future of the Indian Ocean world.

The exhibition probes complex and vexing questions, including: How do artists working in a variety of media make sense of the great mixing of peoples in the region's past and present? How do they conceive of the water that linked distant shores? How do they address borders dividing spaces that for so long were undivided? What do the rising ocean waters resulting from global warming portend for the future of the Indian Ocean and, most importantly, for its inhabitants?

This last question is examined through videos and animations on the formation of the Indian Ocean, the Asian monsoon, and climate change. The gallery on the floor above features interviews with climate and ocean scientists from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, a film on the fishing crisis in Mauritius, and an interactive display for visitors to explore the effects of rising waters around the world.

Organized by the McMullen Museum, the exhibition has been curated by Prasannan Parthasarathi and Salim Currimjee and underwritten by Boston College with major support from the Patrons of the McMullen Museum and Liliane and Christian Haub in honor of Marie-Liliane '13, Maximilian '14, and Constantin '17 Haub.

The Formation of the Indian Ocean

The Indian Ocean is the youngest of the world's three major oceans. It began to form some 180 million years ago when the supercontinent Gondwana broke apart. The Indian subcontinent drifted northeast where it collided with the Eurasian landmass, Africa moved west, and Australia separated from Antarctica, leaving behind the Indian Ocean.

The configuration of land and sea facilitated long-distance sailing on its waters from an early date and shaped the climate, which is characterized by the seasonal rains (called monsoon from the Arabic word for season, *mawsim*) that make life possible across the Indian Ocean world.

(View video here: <https://youtu.be/xmuYuDSILGI>)

The Asian Monsoon

The Indian Ocean is the only ocean where winds and currents reverse direction over the course of the year. This reversal made sailing long distances safe and predictable. These same winds deliver life-giving rains to many of the lands surrounding the Ocean.

This animation by Caroline Ummenhofer and Sujata Murty of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution explains how the configuration of land and sea produces this pattern of winds and rain known as the monsoon.

(View video here: <https://youtu.be/RQkOhKEtC20>)

Shiraz Bayjoo

(b. 1979) is from Port Louis, Mauritius, and now is based in London. In painting, photography, video, and sculpture he explores the legacies of European colonialism and the mixing of diverse peoples through trade and migration in Mauritius and across the Indian Ocean. The past comes alive in his hands as he incorporates artifacts and archival photographs into his works.

Ocean Miniatures

In these four paintings inspired by illustrations in Charles Darwin's *The Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs* (1842, see below), Bayjoo depicts islands and coral reefs in the Indian Ocean. Coral reefs ring Mauritius, where, as the breeding grounds for countless species of fish, they are a giver of life. Global warming has endangered these reefs, a story that is told in the gallery upstairs in the film *Vey nou Lagon*.

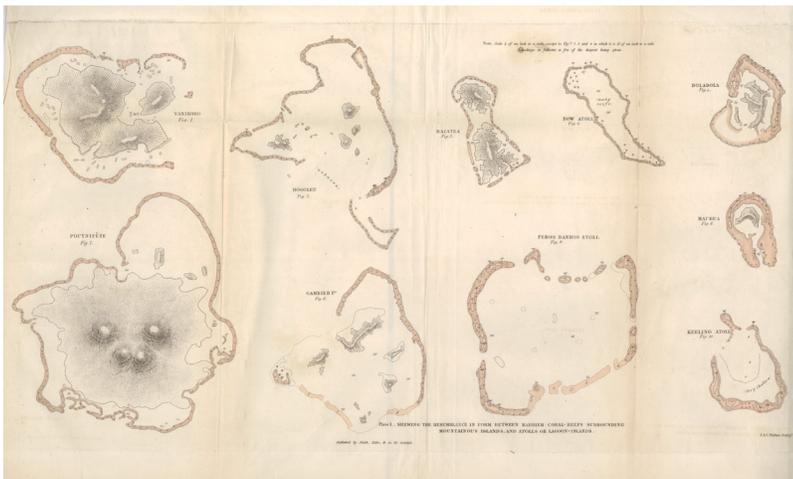


Fig. 7, 2016

acrylic, resin, wood

Courtesy of Shiraz Bayjoo and Ed Cross Fine Art, London

Aldabra No. 2, 2016

acrylic, resin, wood

Courtesy of Shiraz Bayjoo and Ed Cross Fine Art, London

Ma Coeur 2, 2017

acrylic on board, resin, metal

Courtesy of Shiraz Bayjoo and Ed Cross Fine Art, London

Madagascar, 2017

acrylic on board, resin, metal

Courtesy of Shiraz Bayjoo and Ed Cross Fine Art, London

Extraordinary Quarantines

This series of photographs borrows its title from a former British governor who described Mauritius to Mark Twain as a “land of extraordinary quarantine,” a place where one could find “all kinds of mixtures” and “every shade of complexion.” Here Bayjoo focuses on Mauritius as a microcosm of the Indian Ocean world. Its plural society, the product of centuries of migration both forced and free, is where past and present meet and where the Hindu god Hanuman, Rama’s trusted devotee and lieutenant, coexists with a Christian burial ground.

Extraordinary Quarantines #12, 2014

giclée print

Courtesy of Shiraz Bayjoo and Ed Cross Fine Art, London

Extraordinary Quarantines #15, 2014

giclée print

Courtesy of Shiraz Bayjoo and Ed Cross Fine Art, London

Extraordinary Quarantines #38, 2014

giclée print

Courtesy of Shiraz Bayjoo and Ed Cross Fine Art, London

Extraordinary Quarantines #40, 2014

giclée print

Courtesy of Shiraz Bayjoo and Ed Cross Fine Art, London

Sea Shanty, 2013

digital video, 2:10

Courtesy of Shiraz Bayjoo and Ed Cross Fine Art, London

In *Sea Shanty*, Bayjoo recalls the European commercial and colonial presence in the Indian Ocean. Shanties were songs that sailors sang while working in groups onboard large ships. Europeans brought them to the world of the Indian Ocean in the nineteenth century. Bayjoo reminds us that the European maritime and political legacy is ubiquitous in the Indian Ocean world.

(View video here: <https://vimeo.com/185318785>)

Nicholas Hlobo

(b. 1975) lives in Johannesburg, South Africa, and was born in Cape Town. He works in a variety of media to explore questions of masculinity, sexuality, ethnicity, and race. The diversity of South Africa's society comprises a legacy of European settlers, Indian Ocean migrants, and varied indigenous populations. Hlobo draws upon his Xhosa background (reflected in the titles of his works here) to explore South Africa's past, present, and future. His works show that politics in the Indian Ocean world do not only operate at the level of empires and nation-states but also are found in the personal and intimate. Hlobo's forms likewise allude to the ocean and its animals.

Ngumgudu nemizano, 2008

rubber inner tube, ribbon, rubber boots, and vinyl

Collection of Midori Yamamura and Luis H. Francia

Courtesy of Nicholas Hlobo and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul

Combining work boots and industrial materials, in *Ngumgudu nemizano* Hlobo evokes simultaneously hard labor, perhaps in mining or repairing tires, and fetish wardrobes. The ribbons add a stereotypically feminine touch to what is otherwise an exploration of maleness. The splash of white in a tableau of black recalls South Africa's apartheid past. The flabby vinyl bag suggests a fluid underwater creature like an octopus.

Amatholana asibhozo, 2017

ribbon and leather on canvas

Courtesy of Nicholas Hlobo and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul

In *Amatholana asibhozo* Hlobo joins a conventionally masculine attribute, leather, with a feminine one, ribbon. He literally sews them together—blurring the divides between masculine and feminine and the home and the world. With the stitching Hlobo invokes childhood memories of watching his grandmother embroider. He designs the stitching to resemble eels, animals that travel great distances, journeying from freshwater to salt in order to breed—a metaphor for the long and difficult path Hlobo himself has traveled.

Wangechi Mutu

(b. 1972) is from Nairobi, Kenya, and today divides her time between Nairobi and Brooklyn, New York. She is steeped in the worlds of both the Atlantic and

Indian Oceans and her work reflects this double consciousness. The black female body is central to her paintings, collages, films, and performances. She observes, “Females carry the marks, language and nuances of their culture more than the male. Anything that is desired or despised is always placed on the female body.”

Amazing Grace, 2005

digital video, 7:06

Courtesy of Wangechi Mutu and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

The author of “Amazing Grace,” John Newton (1725–1807), was a British abolitionist who had been a slave trader in his early years. The hymn celebrates his delivery from that path of sin. In this video, Mutu sings “Amazing Grace” in Kikuyu (a Kenyan language), recalling its relevance for the Indian Ocean, where a slave trade thrived for centuries. This violent displacement of millions of Africans and Asians contributed to the pluralism of today’s Indian Ocean world.

I’m too Misty, 2015

collage painting on linoleum

Courtesy of Wangechi Mutu and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

Mutu is known for her complex collages that combine a variety of source materials and textures. This work’s title cites the jazz standard, “Misty” made famous by the celebrated singers Ella Fitzgerald (1917–96) and Sarah Vaughan (1924–90). Here, the artist assembles printed materials and objects from contemporary culture to show that the female form is a montage of experiences and narratives.

Mutu is associated with Afrofuturism, a term coined by cultural critic Mark Dery to describe artistic representations by people of African descent based on “images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future.”

Hajra Waheed

(b. 1980) lives and works in Montréal, Canada. She uses complex narrative structures to explore covert networks of power, mass surveillance, cultural distortion, and the alienation of displaced subjects via mass migration. Waheed was raised in the gated headquarters of the oil giant Saudi Aramco in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. Her childhood experience of secrecy and isolation—the compound was protected by multiple layers of security—and her proximity to sites of oil extraction have informed her interactive installations, collages, videos, and sculptures.

Untitled (MAP), 2016 (edition 1/6)

infographic print on vellum

Courtesy of Hajra Waheed

Since 1945, the western stretches of the Indian Ocean have become the global center of oil extraction. *Untitled (MAP)* is a classified map of the world's largest offshore oil field, located in the Persian Gulf 165 miles north of Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. Waheed's folded work conveys that surveillance does not take place only on a horizontal plane, but also on a vertical one, reaching from satellites in the sky to the ocean floor. In this case, such surveillance was done in the name of oil. Burning oil and other fossil fuels has led to our climate crisis.

Strata 1–24, 2017

cut Letratone and Mylar, ink and archival tape on paper

Courtesy of Hajra Waheed

Strata 1–24 is a series that forms part of the artist's ongoing visual novel *Sea Change* (2011–), which comprises hundreds of works. The series chronicles the disappearances of nine characters over nine chapters that unfold over the artist's lifetime. Part of chapter one, *Strata 1–24* reveals Waheed's interest in extraction from the earth. It consists of fragmentary fieldnotes of the novel's main character, who is on a quest to find quartz crystals lost amongst rubble and rock.

Penny Siopis

(b. 1953) is honorary professor at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, where she lives and works. Known for her paintings and videos, she responded to the invitation to participate in this exhibition by creating the works on display. Each engages with the rising waters of the Indian Ocean, a consequence of the buildup of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and global warming. Siopis warns that borders cannot contain rising waters and that humanity's future is uncertain.

She Breathes Water, 2019

digital video, 5:12

Courtesy of Penny Siopis and Stevenson Cape Town

Assembled from found footage, *She Breathes Water* laments the damage that people have wrought upon our planet. Foreseeing the possibility of a world in which humans will cease to exist, Siopis asks, "Can you imagine the world without you?"

Warm Waters, 2018–19

glue, ink, and oil on paper

Courtesy of Penny Siopis and Stevenson Cape Town

In *Warm Waters*, colors overflow the paintings' borders, mirroring the rising waters that refuse to be confined within the boundaries of nations. Siopis says of the series: "With global warming, what do we imagine? Burning? Drowning? Absolute alterity? And what forms—or formlessnesses—do we imagine this through?"

The Climate Crisis in Ten Charts

The earth's climate is changing, a result of fossil fuel burning and forest destruction. In the last century, average global temperatures have risen 1°C (1.8°F). The effects of this warming, from deadly wildfires to superstorms, are found around the world. This slideshow explains the climate crisis, highlighting causes, consequences, as well as “good news.” The iPads in the gallery allow visitors to explore climate change in more detail.

(View original *Guardian* article here: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/sep/20/the-climate-crisis-explained-in-10-charts>)

Climate Change 101

This slideshow, by Boston College Professor of Earth and Environmental Sciences Gail Kineke, outlines the basic causes and effects of global climate change.

(View PDF of slides here: <https://www.bc.edu/artmuseum/exhibitions/ioc/climate-101.pdf>)

Shilpa Gupta

(b. 1976) lives and works in Mumbai, India, the city of her birth. In the works displayed here she explores the arbitrariness of nation-states and the resilience of communities divided by borders. Xenophobia and violence against “outsiders” exploded in the Indian Ocean world during the Great Depression of the 1930s. After World War II, with the end of empires, nation-states were created across the region. Borders were erected, dividing communities that had lived together for centuries. Nowhere was this more harshly true than in British-ruled India, which was partitioned in 1947 by a border drawn in just six weeks to create India and Pakistan.

Untitled (There Is No Border Here), 2005–06

wall drawing with self-adhesive tape

Courtesy of Shilpa Gupta and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Beijing, Les Moulins, and La Habana

In this wall drawing, Gupta subverts the association between flags and boundaries. Assembling text to construct a flag, she voices the geographical and cultural connections that unite across borders and conveys the futility of separating peoples and territories. Gupta speaks to the refusal of many in the Indian Ocean world to allow borders and nation-states to divide.

Speaking Wall, 2009–10

interactive sensor-based sound installation: LCD screen, bricks, headphones, 8:00 interaction loop

Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar

Courtesy of Shilpa Gupta and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Beijing, Les Moulins, and La Habana

In *Speaking Wall* Gupta upends the notion of borders as visible, impermeable, and permanent. Rather, she invites visitors to experience borders as invisible (“the wall in your house that you are unable to see”), permeable (“to visit our mother’s grave”), and impermanent (“the rains shifted the border”).

Speaking Wall transcription

Step away one step
Go a bit further away
Go back
Step away one step

Stay
I am the wall in your house
that you are unable to see

You walk past me
and you may never know
You came
You took
You left
I continue to bleed

Step a bit closer
Step a bit closer
Closer
Closer
Closer

Step a bit closer
But you are still unable to see me
And the distance is convenient

Beyond this screen
You really don't have to know me

One step back
One more
One step back
One more
One step forward
Move forward

Ok fine
Now you are no longer stepping on the
border

Are you not able to see it?
It is on the ground below you

The wind shifted it by a few cms
One step forward
One step forward

So it's fine

So I no longer need
Your ID
No longer need to know
Your name
Your religion
Your sex
and the place you come from

Step a bit closer

A bit closer

Is the place you come from
The place you were born
Or the place you grew up
Or the place you inhabit

Virtually

Mentally

Philosophically

Physically

Step away one step

March forward one step

One step

Yes

Now you are on the line
where I last night made the border
But since it is raining today
It's a bit difficult to see it

Did grand mom come
from your side onto my side
to visit our mother's grave?

Ah, she must have
Still got the keys to the house

What do I do?
She took the keys
And walked
forward a few cms more
And the rain shifted
the border last night

I am no longer able to enter my house

Fenced Borders

Every summer, people over dinner tables across India and Pakistan spend hours talking and arguing over the taste of mango.

Walking not far, toward the east, stand the alluring mangroves that have captured the imagination and stories of the islands of the Sundarbans swamps, stretching like a band through the two countries of India and Bangladesh, as they dip into the Bay of Bengal.

The acacias of Western Sahara sprawl across the dry sands of the several lengths of barrier gradually built by Morocco through a land left in flux after those who came and left.

Olive is the national tree of Palestine and Israel.

Pecan is relished in Mexico and the USA.

The length of thread is in ratio to the length of fences constructed on different borders.

—Shilpa Gupta

***Mango Tree 1:7834000*, 2013**

thread and glue on paper

private collection

Courtesy of Shilpa Gupta and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Beijing, Les Moulins, and La Habana

***Mangrove 1:6235011*, 2013**

thread and glue on paper

private collection

Courtesy of Shilpa Gupta and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Beijing, Les Moulins, and La Habana

***Acacia Tree 1:2337358*, 2013**

thread and glue on paper

private collection

Courtesy of Shilpa Gupta and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Beijing, Les Moulins, and La Habana

***Olive Tree 1:1547703*, 2013**

thread and glue on paper

private collection

Courtesy of Shilpa Gupta and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Beijing, Les Moulins, and La Habana

***Pecan Tree 1:3897254*, 2013**

thread and glue on paper

private collection

Courtesy of Shilpa Gupta and Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Beijing, Les Moulins, and La Habana

Indian Ocean: Current Status

The waters of the world's oceans are warming. In the Indian Ocean, sea levels are rising, monsoon rains are increasing, and phytoplankton populations are falling. Climate change is reshaping the long-standing relationship between land and sea, which made large areas of the Indian Ocean world habitable. The result is displacement, migration, and uncertain futures for hundreds of millions.

In this gallery visitors can learn about the research of climate scientists from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, view a film on the Mauritian fishing crisis, explore the effects of rising waters around the world, and browse important publications on global warming and the Indian Ocean.

Rising ocean waters do not respect borders. Will the nations of the world heed the warnings of scientists and act across these divides to address the climate crisis?

Climate Change and the Future

Temperatures on land and sea are rising rapidly in the Indian Ocean, where waters are warming faster than in the tropical Pacific or Atlantic. Warmer waters are leading to heavier monsoon rains, rising sea levels, and falling populations of phytoplankton, the base of the marine food system.

(View PDF of these slides here: <https://bc.edu/artmuseum/exhibitions/ioc/future.pdf>)

The Indian Ocean Dipole

Before the mid-twentieth century, scientists neglected the Indian Ocean; it still remains understudied. Recognizing the Indian Ocean's central role in the earth's climate and ocean systems, young scientists are bringing innovative methods to its study.

In this video, Caroline Ummenhofer from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution explains the Indian Ocean Dipole and how it contributes to shaping weather from East Africa to Australia. When the Dipole leads to unusually warm waters in the western Indian Ocean, Australia suffers from droughts and East Africa experiences heavy rains. A key question for researchers is how warming waters will affect such weather patterns.

(View video here: <https://youtu.be/KRJcezey7SU>)

Coral and Climate Data

Before the mid-twentieth century, scientists neglected the Indian Ocean; it still remains understudied. Recognizing the Indian Ocean's central role in the earth's climate and ocean systems, young scientists are bringing innovative methods to its study.

In this video, Sujata Murty from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution explains how she uses evidence from coral to reconstruct historic climate data for the Indian Ocean. This information will help scientists predict the impacts of a warming world on climate.

(View video here: <https://youtu.be/JBrUU89Nsfg>)

Surging Seas

Rising seas threaten to inundate coastlines around the world. This display loops through several cities to show how temperature affects sea level. Visit the full tool online at seeing.climatecentral.org to view any coastal area.

Vey nou Lagon, 2016

22:07

Produced and directed by Vanina Harel and Zara Currimjee

The coral reefs that ring the island of Mauritius, depicted in Shiraz Bayjoo's paintings on display downstairs, are home to countless varieties of fish. Pollution, overfishing, and warming waters due to climate change have led to a sharp decline in fish populations and threaten the livelihoods of thousands of fishing families on Mauritius and neighboring Rodrigues.

Vey nou Lagon ("protect our lagoons") shows how fishermen took matters into their own hands by instituting measures to restrict their catches. The number of fish has rebounded, demonstrating the power of collective action to address growing environmental problems.

(View video here: <https://youtu.be/eFR-exKmvO4>)