

A book on the show 'Megacities Asia' MFA Boston . Author –Al miner and Laura Weinstein. 2016



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Detail, see p. 80

## AADITI JOSHI

Mumbai

Aaditi Joshi (born in 1980) occasionally stops on the Mumbai roadside to absorb the surreal landscape before her eyes—enormous hills of discarded plastic form a rugged urban topography. Joshi says that when looking at these materials and understanding the social fallout they cause, she is disturbed but also moved to incorporate them into her artistic practice.

India has a history of disposable culture. For generations, roadside vendors and food stalls served tea in *kulhars*, simple, unglazed, and fired terra-cotta vessels.

After consuming their contents, customers would toss the vessels onto the ground or into a nearby field, where they would disintegrate. In today's Indian megacities, a booming consumer culture also casts off objects. However, affordable, mass-produced plastic cups have replaced kulhars. These and countless other disposable items, including the ubiquitous plastic shopping bag, are discarded in alarming quantities. Research

proves that globally the volume of waste is increasing even faster than the rate of urbanization.<sup>1</sup> The long-term damage caused by dumping plastic has been widely reported, but nonrecycled plastic can have an immediate negative impact as well. Of contemporary Mumbai, writer Suketu Mehta observes, "The air outside is a rain of plastic bags, which has replaced the parrots I grew up with."<sup>2</sup>

While Joshi is concerned with the threat plastic poses to oceanic ecosystems, for her plastic bags took on new significance in 2005, when a massive flood swept across the state of Maharashtra and killed hundreds of people in Mumbai.

Monsoons soak Mumbai annually, but on July 26, 2005, a season's worth of rain poured down in one day. Mumbai's geography lends itself to flooding, and the widespread disposal of plastic bags led to tragedy. Casually discarded bags end up on the city's roads, then in its pipes and sewers. On that July 26 the massive accumulation of bags choked the city's gutters and deteriorating drainage system. Open sewers that had been closed to make way for new construction exacerbated the impact. People were stranded on top of cars; others were trampled to death by crowds headed for higher ground.<sup>3</sup> Joshi recounts that given the outpouring of media coverage, the flood was impossible to ignore even from a safe distance.

Accumulating a significant quantity of these thin, multicolored plastic bags has become a way for Joshi to initiate dialogue about these issues and to look at these materials in new ways. By gathering and physically altering bags Joshi is able to create large, site-specific installations that require audiences to confront found objects in unex-

pected ways. Through the careful consideration of architectural space and scale, Joshi manipulates viewers' physical experiences and in turn their modes of perception. In one instance, she created a solid wall of bags at the bottom of a grand stair, which disrupted the flow of foot traffic. Another iteration of this series was built with six thousand plastic bags that spanned a room on an arc-shaped armature, allowing audiences to walk under and look up at an off-kilter rainbow. These physical interventions and the experiences they spark in audiences seem especially relevant in the context of Mumbai, one of the world's most crowded cities, with the largest concentration of high-rise buildings in India.

To create these bold works, Joshi uses heat to manipulate and fuse together the bags. She applies the heat—from a candle, a bag



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sealer, or a heat gun—three or four times to create texture, and, like alchemy, these ubiquitous objects of a convenience-obsessed urban culture become lacelike. By embedding LED lights inside the plastic, she accentuates its surprising delicacy. In addition to changing the appearance of the plastic, the heat hardens it, making it stable enough to create many small clusters that can easily be affixed to large, wooden armatures. Once an exhibition is over, Joshi dismantles the piece and reuses the clusters in subsequent works.

Despite the very real environmental hazards plastic bags can create, Joshi does not see them in an entirely negative light. While vast accumulations of them are potentially dangerous, plastic has valuable practical applications that contribute to the functionality of the megacity and, as she proves with her own accumulations, intriguing visual qualities. The artistic use of common bags is neither new nor unique to India.

During a 1938 group exhibition in Paris, Duchamp famously created an installation of twelve hundred burlap coal sacks hung from the ceiling to disrupt the conventions of gallery architecture.<sup>4</sup> There are contemporary precedents as well; artists from North America to Africa and beyond are using plastic bags in response to global ecological concerns.<sup>5</sup> But Joshi's initial interest in bags was optical; she was seduced by the transparency of the plastic. As she says, "Against the backdrop of such a dysfunctional urban landscape, I am inspired by the form and potential of the plastic bag . . . compelled to draw out its duality—as an object of trash and an object of beauty. I invite the audience to observe objects normally bypassed and overlooked with fresh eyes."—AM

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Joshi at work and detail, see p. 80



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Image of Ongoing sight specific work at MFA Boston 2016.

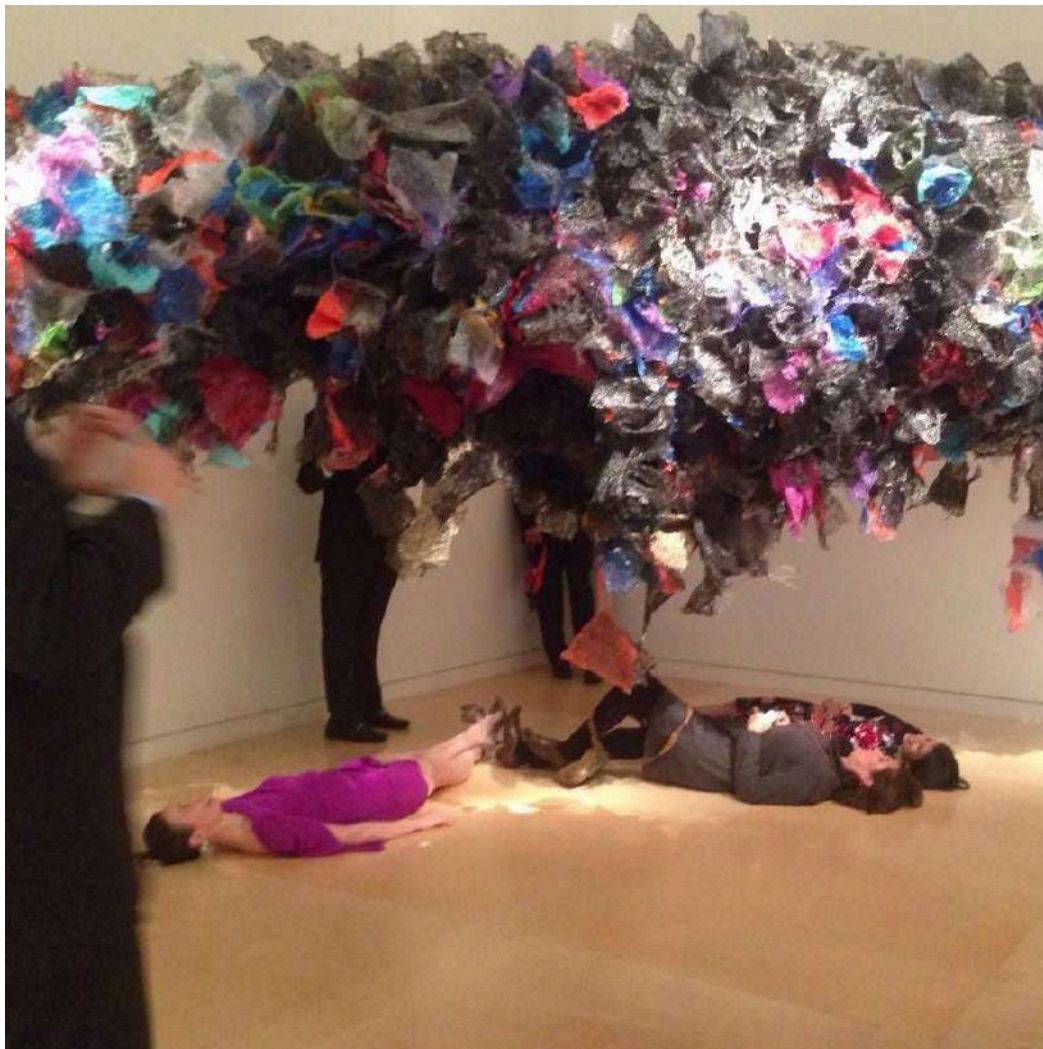


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Image of Ongoing sight specific work at MFA Boston 2016.



Work size- 432 x 110 x 92 inch . Fused Plastic Bags, Acrylic paint, LED lights, wood armature .2016



Visitors interacting with the work At MFA.





Visitors interacting with the work At MFA.



Visitors interacting with the work At MFA.



Visitors interacting with the work At MFA.



Visitors interacting with the work At MFA.



  jennmac66

Kids interacting with the work At MFA.

Reviews on Megacities Asia show Museum Of Fine Arts Boston. April 3rd until July 17<sup>th</sup>. 2016

<http://bigredandshiny.org/24610/topographies-of-trash-aaditi-joshi-at-the-mfa-boston/>

[http://www.lokvani.com/lokvani/article.php?article\\_id=11911](http://www.lokvani.com/lokvani/article.php?article_id=11911)

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