

Sutapa Biswas: Lumen

26 June – 20 March 2022



Sutapa Biswas, *Light Rain*, 2015 (production still). Made possible thanks to the generous support of Beppu Projects, Agency for Cultural Affairs Government of Japan, the Kashima Residency 2015. © Sutapa Biswas. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2021

BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art is pleased to present a solo exhibition by Sutapa Biswas. The exhibition will span Biswas's extensive career and include a major new film commission titled *Lumen*. A companion exhibition will take place at Kettle's Yard in autumn 2021. Developed in partnership, these exhibitions will provide the most substantial survey presentation of the artist's work in seventeen years.

Biswas works in a wide range of media including drawing, painting, photography, moving image, installation and performance. In the 1980s, Biswas was a vital contributor to the Black Arts Movement in Britain. Her work first came to prominence in the landmark exhibition *The Thin Black Line* curated by the artist Lubaina Himid at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London in 1985. Interested in exploring the often complex relationships between colonial histories and gender, race and class, Biswas investigates both personal and historical narratives, disrupting, challenging and reimagining the canon of Western art history. Renowned art historian Griselda Pollock has said that it was Biswas who 'forced us all to acknowledge the Eurocentric limits of the discourses within which we practised'.

The exhibition at BALTIC will consider recurring themes in Biswas's work such as motherhood, migration, memory, loss and temporality through drawings, photography and the moving image. The selection of works will draw on her

personal history and family relationships. In the photographic series *Synapse I* (1992–94), her body becomes a site for projected images taken during her first return to India since moving to the UK in 1966, including a snapshot of the landscape around her grandmother’s house and other psychological cartographies the artist yearned to recover. In the two-screen installation of the film *Birdsong* (2004), inspired by the first sentence spoken by the artist’s son, Biswas conjures a magical imaginary world where a horse lives with the family in their living room. Other works – such as the haunting film *Magnesium Bird* (2004) which features birds sculpted from magnesium ribbon being ignited at dusk in the setting of the Victorian walled gardens at Harewood House in Yorkshire, and the artist’s ongoing series of delicate bird drawings *Time Flies* (2004–2021) which reflects on a written passage by Marcel Proust – are a moving tribute to her late father.

The exhibitions at BALTIC and Kettle’s Yard will premiere a new film titled *Lumen* (2020–21) that maps a semi-fictional narrative of migration. Filmed on location in India and England, *Lumen* summons Biswas’s maternal ancestors through a monologue written by the artist, evoking memories of the artist’s journey by sea between Mumbai and Dover, when her family emigrated under difficult circumstances. The artist’s personal history overlaps with other maritime histories, from the Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades, to post-emancipation British colonial trade and post-colonial migration. The work also draws on the long histories of transit associated with the River Tyne, which flows adjacent to BALTIC, and the material resonances of maritime trade at Kettle’s Yard, in the form of seventeenth-century Dutch Delft tiles in the collection.

The film *Lumen* (2020–21) has been co-commissioned by Film and Video Umbrella, Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, Kettle’s Yard, University of Cambridge and BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art with Art Fund support through the Moving Image Fund for Museums. This programme is made possible thanks to Thomas Dane Gallery and a group of private galleries and individuals. The commission has been additionally supported by Autograph. Supported by Arts Council England.

This exhibition has been developed in partnership with Kettle’s Yard, University of Cambridge and is accompanied by a new publication designed by Kajsa Ståhl of Åbäke, co-published with Kettle’s Yard and Ridinghouse. The publication is supported by the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art. The exhibition at BALTIC and the publication are additionally supported by Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University.

The companion exhibition *Sutapa Biswas: Lumen* will take place at Kettle’s Yard, University of Cambridge from 16 October 2021 – 30 January 2022.

Notes to Editors:

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About Sutapa Biswas

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Sutapa Biswas was born in Santiniketan, India, in 1962. She studied Fine Art and Art History at the University of Leeds (1981–85), Fine Art at The Slade School of Art (1988–90) and undertook practice-based research at the Royal College of Art (1995–98). Her work has been shown nationally and internationally at The British Museum (2020-21); Tate (2011-12 and 2000); Neuberger Museum, New York (2009); Melbourne International Arts Festival (2006); Nara Roesler, Sao Paolo (2008); Art Gallery of Ontario (2000); Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven (1998); the 6th Havana Biennial (1997); The Photographer's Gallery, London and Leeds City Art Gallery (1992-93); Vancouver Art Gallery (1991) and Arnolfini, Bristol (1991). In 2004, a major solo exhibition (with accompanying publication) toured between the Institute of International Visual Arts, London and the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College, Portland, Oregon.

In 2015, Biswas was the Kashima Artist in Residence in Japan, which resulted in her participation in the *Mixed Bathing World 2015 Triennial*, Beppu, Oita. Biswas was a recipient of the Yale Center for British Art Visiting Scholars Award 2019-20. She received The National Endowment for the Arts Award, Visiting Artist, Mills College, Oakland, California in 1994 and is a European Photography Award 1992 nominee. Her artworks are represented in collections including Tate; Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, Bradford City Museums and Art Galleries; Gallery Oldham; Sheffield Museums and Art Galleries; The Stanley and Audrey Burton Art Gallery, University of Leeds; Reed College, Portland, Oregon; Rochdale Art Gallery and Arts Council Collection.

About BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art

BALTIC is a major international centre for contemporary art situated on the south bank of the River Tyne in Gateshead, England and has welcomed over eight million visitors since opening to the public in July 2002. BALTIC presents a distinctive and ambitious programme of exhibitions and events, and is a world leader in the presentation and commissioning of contemporary visual art.

Housed in a landmark ex-industrial building, BALTIC consists of 2,600 square metres of art space, making it the UK's largest dedicated contemporary art institution. BALTIC has gained an international reputation for its commissioning of cutting-edge temporary exhibitions. It has presented the work of over 460 artists of 60 nationalities in 220 exhibitions to date.

BALTIC



KETTLE'S YARD

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