

47 Canal

Ajay Kurian

Proleptic

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During the 1940s, the creation of the bomb was our modern Faustian story, those writing it both brilliant and complicated personalities. Its inception signaled our newfound responsibility and stewardship as well as our daunting finitude. Talk of the bomb raised all of humanity to the stature of a tragic hero, an actor whose fallible footing was all the more dangerous now that he had lifted his head above the stars. Left undiscussed, however, was the less heroic issue of nuclear waste. While we proceeded to develop nuclear energy and further warheads, the problem of such toxic waste exceeded our temporal jurisdiction, leaving us with no solution but deferral and repression. Today, there are various stations throughout the United States that shuttle this waste from one place to another, Yucca Mountain perhaps being the best known, but it's in the Chihuahu desert at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant that America is embarking on a project to house our nuclear waste for the next ten thousand years.

The project occupies a unique place at the outer limits of our cultural and ecological imagination. By promising to last for a specific span of time, it avoids any mythic dissolution into the impossible abstraction of "forever" or "eternity". Nevertheless, a promise of time longer than human history may as well be forever. Included within this massive engineering feat - constructed on the questionable combination of cheap optimism and oceanfront folly - are the wonderfully strange visual designs meant to warn the near and distant future of the site's dangers. Though it's been officially noted that all design decisions were formed through consultations with committees of sociologists, scientists, artists, thinkers, and others, the results are stupefying. Symbols that look like the scrawlings of a modern child with his iPad; giant forty-ton granite monuments punctuating the exterior of an massive, protective earth wall and inscribed with seven languages meant to be our present day Rosetta stones; ceramic and aluminum discs scattered throughout with similar warnings, buried a mere 6 feet deep for the random passerby; and non-visual signatures such as powerful permanent magnets and radar deflectors produce invisible fields and disturbances detectable by any being lacking a sense of sight. Each sign is as amazing and ludicrous as the next. This site is not for us. It is not for *our* future, it is for a unspecifiable future where humanity may not even exist.

The long *durée* of nuclear waste - some tens of thousands of years - continues to exist alongside the accelerating speed of human technologies. However, just as we have radically reduced the diversity of beings on the planet, we too have reduced the diversity of temporalities, feeding only our drive towards the speed of data exchange. We have lost sight of a healthy temporal ecology, forgetting the time of the glacier, of carbon cycles, and nuclear waste. We're unable to hear how these things speak, their syllables stretching over decades rather than moments. As we attempt existence amidst temporal superlatives - the too short and the too long - we resort to various forms of myopic mastery that disregard the simplest stumbling blocks, like the ground beneath our feet. When we hear the rumbles of unrest, earthly or otherwise, we grab headphones - thinking that it's merely a disagreeable sound.

Ajay Kurian (b. 1984) is an artist and curator. Kurian has exhibited internationally at Gavin Brown's enterprise, Art: Concept, Harris Lieberman, Jack Hanley Gallery, Room East, and the Artist's Institute in New York, as well as CAMRaleigh and White Flag Projects, St. Louis, and MoMA PS1. In 2011, Kurian has had solo exhibitions at Audio Visual Arts, New York and recently at Jhaveri Contemporary in Mumbai, India. Kurian's recent curatorial projects include the exhibitions Gran Prix, co-curated with Nudashank, Baltimore and Prolegomena at Jack Hanley Gallery, New York, a collaboration with Shifter magazine. This is his first exhibition at 47 Canal.