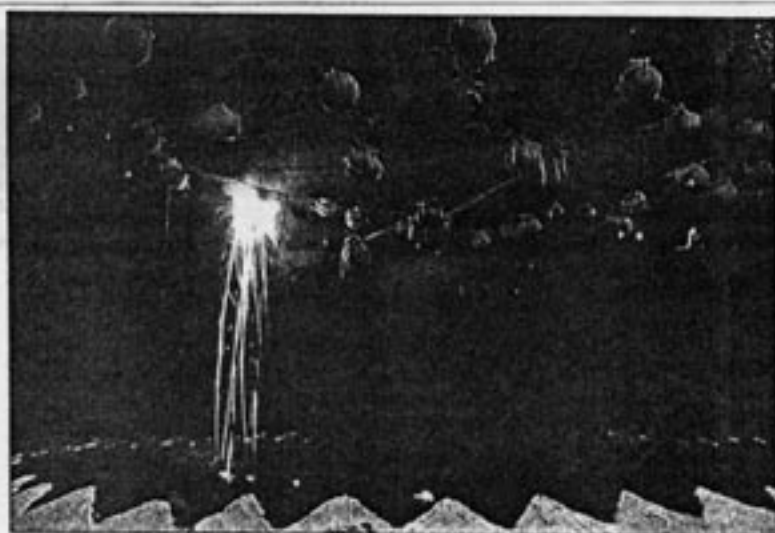


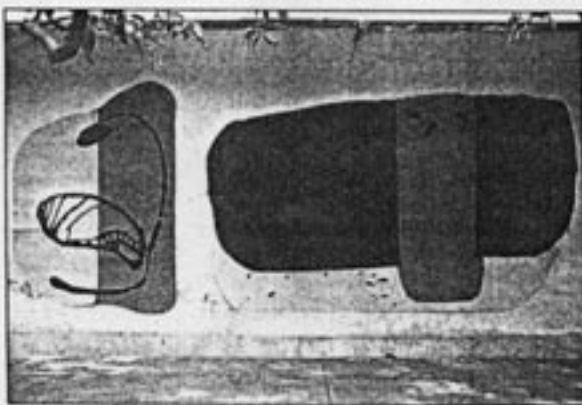
bravura in evidence at Khoj, one could identify a mode of working and a preference for materials, which is currently fashionable with Indian artists (the foreigners were pretty much outside of this trend, for better or worse). Part of this comes from the fact that all of the artists were encouraged to use materials which they found in and around Modinagar and part from the park-like setting of Sikribagh which provides a certain type of natural site for sculpture (if one left the immediate house which most artists did). What we had then was a predominance of installations which used trees for their supporting structures (hanging and dangling were big), "earth art" type excavations, and works which employed traditional craft techniques and materials (albeit at grandiose scales). Often these works felt as if to be the remnants of a performance or ritual (the artist's own labours, appropriately enough?), often their strengths lay in their metaphysical properties (as in the magnetised clusters of iron filings in Bharti Kher's piece, the viewer's own refracted reflection, as seen at the bottom of Manisha

Parakh's sculpture, or the smouldering fuses which sought to disembowel Umesh's giant structure). In contrast to these feisty works, the floating tent and participatory raft which crossed the pond (made by Dutch artist Bastienne Kramer, whose manipulations of tents were seen a few years ago at the NGMA) probably didn't look "arty" enough to most visitors. Discounting the fact that symbolism and meaning can certainly be read into materials and forms, Content (with a capital C) itself was none too popular at Khoj '98. Pushpamala may have been making some sort of



Detail of the installation sculpture by MS Umesh of Bangalore

stab at it with her self-portrait (feminist?) photo essay but in the end the images were all too similar and vague to make much effect. Chandragupta Thenuwara from Colombo spent much of his time painting barrels with all-over patternings. The silliness of his self-proclaimed "Barrelism" only



Two paintings by Sheila Makhijani of New Delhi

became poignant when he explained how his hometown had become a virtual solid blockade of barrels due to the on-going civil war. It was up to American artist Carter Hodgkin to roll up her sleeves and confront sex in all its complicated messiness, both ancient and contemporary. She created a series of palm-leaf manuscripts, which illustrate excerpts from the Starr Report (which pathetically details what really went on between Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton) with glossy four-colour bits from coffee table books on the *Kamasutra*. Spread as they were across the makeshift boudoir she

created on Sikribagh's terrace, Hodgkin lounged seductively with her wares, addressing both India's projections of promiscuity onto America and America's projections of erotic exotica onto India. I was surprised that none

of the Indian artists chose the subjects of the Modi family or Modinagar itself (environmental conditions, labour relations, health and education standards?) for investigation though, to be fair, one of the only Indian artists who does work in this manner was invited to the workshop but had to decline because of other commitments.

Scattered as they are throughout the house and grounds of Sikribagh, the works often employ manipulated found objects and/or the location of the work itself. Qudus Mirza from Lahore was the class clown, placing signs labelling each of the artists' works as not his own, effectively creating a work out of nothing, the artist-provocateur as anti-creator. Anita Dube painted big pairs of eyes on the back of each door throughout the house, a creepy and intrusive gesture especially when first encountered (as I did) when taking a seat in the loo. The Israeli

artist Margot Granstrung together a disembodied narrative with handkerchief ladders cascading from the roof of the house, jump-ropes left scattered, and bird tracks leading to a mini-maze of planted grass. Unfortunately, intertwined as they were between everyone else's projects, her train of thought was hard to secure a ticket on. The final effect of all this aesthetic displacement, meandering motives and general tomfoolery is to force the viewer to re-assess what we define as a work of art. Coming upon heaps of trash or piles of tent-house durries, one asks, "Whose work is this?" Many of the visitors that day were captivated by the signboard; spelling out "Khoj '98" executed in *dal* and *channaby* by the caterers themselves.

In the end, what may be the most valuable aspect of Khoj is that it is not simply a group show of works by artists from different countries being installed in a museum or gallery, but that it is a pressure cooker of creativity where artists are living and working together. Considering that half of the artists came from outside of India and had almost no time prior to adjust (and most of the Indian artists came from outside of Delhi) it is truly remarkable how much work was produced and how high the calibre of works produced was. There were tensions, disagreements, conflicts and power struggles going on at Sikribagh to be sure (is a Sood Report due out soon?), there were logistical mess-ups and a general grumbling about services from the participants, but there were also insights gained, dialogues broadened and friendships forged. Let's hope the organisers have the energy, the wherewithal and (probably most importantly) the funding to continue Khoj far into the future and expand its reach far beyond Modinagar. ■