

## **The third episode of A. R. T. 2020 examines the changing face of Identity as depicted by artists**

*'How can you be an artist and not reflect the times?'*  
-Nina Simone

### **For Immediate Release**

The year 2020 will be remembered as a turning point in human history. Not just because of the Covid-19 pandemic, but also because of how this unprecedented event among other factors like-- the fight for sustainability, the #metoo movement, the civil and political uprisings around the world and advent and firm foothold of digital and social media in the human consciousness/experience-- have erased borders and boundaries between us as we know them and has given us a chance to reinvent and redefine ourselves. Beyond 2020, will religious, racial, gender or political lines be redrawn? Will maps and boundaries undergo a sea change? Will an event like the Covid-19 pandemic change our collective outlook in a meta way- as a species? Now more than ever, do we need to deem our collective identity as more important than individual identity? Is contemporary art in 2020 shifting emphasis to highlight the importance of collective identity?

What will identity, then, look like in the nearing future with all such borders and barriers being broken down in the present? How will art enable an entire generation moving forward to redefine and help to make sense of themselves?

**Kommune India** and **Avid Learning** present **A. R. T. 2020: Identity 2020** – the third episode of **Art Redefined Today (A. R. T.) 2020** as a part of a specially curated virtual week – **A. R. T. 2020: New Paradigms in Education, Creation and Identity**. This thematic week will explore the future trajectories of art, the evolution of the discipline and the various trends that are emerging within the space as related to educational curricula, artist residencies and art-making.

*Artist and Activist Durga Gawde, Visual Artist Rithika Merchant and Artistic Director, St+art India Foundation Hanif Kureshi* will be in conversation with *Curator Veeranganakumari Solanki*.

### **The description of the discussion is as below:**

The concept of identity is constantly evolving and has become exceedingly complex in a globalised and overly connected world. How do artists capture these complexities? Why do artists engage with the concept of identity and why do they feel the concept of self is best represented through art? How is art acting as a unifying factor and bringing people together? How do artists adapt their approaches and treatment when dealing with various aspects of identity – personal, collective social?

With the unprecedented ascendance of the internet in our lives and as social media platforms serve as aggregators, definers and facilitators of experiences, of interactions, knowledge-sharing and connections, how will we be defined by social media? What is the growing influence of the media and social media on artistic identity?

India is a diverse country with multiple religious socio cultural linguistic and communal differences. How do artists navigate and depict this diverse cultural landscape to truly capture the fabric and identity of us as a

whole? How do artists pull strands from culture and tradition and incorporate cultural roots of identity formation and expression?

*Read more about the Series below:*

This four-part series that seeks to re-energise conversations around Art and the future of Art by engaging with emerging issues and trends and also focusing on taking the conversation beyond – into the stratosphere of Indian contemporary art of tomorrow. Topics to be touched upon include Meme Art and the Future of Art Engagement, Redefining Traditional Art in today's world, Identity and Body politics in 2020 and Intersections between Science, Technology and Art.

Join us to learn about how innovations in art help us – as individuals, cultures, communities, races and even as a species – to re-examine and re-define at the concept of identity!

**When:** Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> August 2020 | 6:00 PM – 7:30 PM

**RSVP:** [www.avidlearning.in](http://www.avidlearning.in)

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## **About the Speakers**

**Durga Gawde** is a sculptor, Educator, Activist and India's first performing drag king. Durga graduated with a BFA in Sculpture from The Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) in 2015. Durga has been a teaching fellow with Urbanframe, an organisation run out of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge and has also been a visiting faculty member at ISDI Parson's, Mumbai. Durga has given various talks and lectures throughout the country about art, design, technology and identity. Being a genderfluid person, Durga felt compelled to be an activist and educate the masses about the presence of various non-binary identities in the world. Durga's work, thoughts and intentions have been published in numerous publications like Art India, Architectural Digest, Vogue, GQ, Femina, Harper's Bazaar, Elle Decor, Homegrown to name a few. Durga was part of the Grazia magazine 'Cool list 2018', and on the digital cover of Vogue India Sept 2019. Durga has collaborated with online video platforms like Vice and Vitamin Stree to spread their message: ' Humanity should bind us and our differences should be viewed as things that give us character and not be used against us to marginalise and discriminate.' Durga is involved in the modelling world (usually cast as themself), they believe that by being themself in front of the camera, they can influence a lot of minds to look at and challenge various beauty standards. Fashion is expression, and gender expression is a big part of Durga's life. Durga featured with the designer label 'Bobo Calcutta' in Lakme fashion week, 2018. Durga started to experiment with gender identity through drag and performance art. Their drag alter ego is called 'Shakti' and is the first performing drag king in India. Durga's practice uses various mediums to express and inspire but the string that binds all that they do is being true to oneself and working from a place of love.

**Rithika Merchant** (b. 1986) received her Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts from Parsons – The New School of Design, New York (2008). Since graduating, she has exhibited her work extensively, including a number of solo exhibitions in India, Spain, Germany, France and the United States. Her most recent solo shows include, Mirror

of the Mind at Galerie L.J, Paris, France (2019); Where the Water Takes us at TARQ, Mumbai (2017) and Ancestral Home at Galeria Bien Cuadrado, Barcelona (2017). Her recent group exhibitions include a two-person show Osmosis at TARQ, Mumbai, curated by Shaleen Wadhwa (2019); Spring! A Group Show of Contemporary Drawing at Galerie LJ, Paris (2019) and Chloe Couture at the National Art Museum of Ukraine, Kieve, Ukraine (2019). She has also collaborated with Chlo  , a French fashion house on multiple collections for which she was awarded the Vogue India Young Achiever of the Year Award at its Women of the Year Awards 2018. She was also named one of Vogue Magazine’s Vogue World 100 Creative Voices. She currently divides her time between Mumbai and Barcelona.

**Hanif Kureshi** is Artist Director at St+art India Foundation. An artist and a designer working with Street Art and typography, Hanif absorbs the surroundings into his works and evokes a sense of memory grabbing the attention of the viewers. He has an ironic and sarcastic approach, working in multiple mediums combining into a single composition. His ongoing project, hand-painted type, attempts to conserve and archive the vernacular street typography of India, which he felt is a characteristic medium of Indian traditions seeming to be lost. Hanif is also the co-founder of St+art India Foundation which aims to make art accessible to a larger audience through the series of Street Art festivals. His work has been exhibited at the London Design Biennale, Venice Biennale, Centre Pompidou Paris, Triennale Design Museum, Milan, Sikka Art Fair Dubai among others. In 2016, GQ magazine named Hanif as one of the 50 most influential young Indians.

**Veeranganakumari Solanki** is an independent curator and writer. Her research interest lies in the manner in which images are used and interpreted, ways in which interdisciplinary forms and art merge to create dialogues that travel from public spaces into private ones and the way curatorial research can be structured around artistic practices that expand the ideas of medium specificity through story-telling. Her curatorial projects have primarily focused on South-Asian art practices. She was the 2019 Brooks International Research Fellow at Tate Modern in the curatorial and photography department and a resident at the Delfina Foundation. Veerangana is currently based in India. She has contributed papers and articles to several international art journals and publications. She has curated exhibitions, lectured on curating and art practices, and conducted workshops internationally at institutes and galleries such as the Siddhartha Art Foundation, Kathmandu; the Dhaka Art Summit, Bangladesh; the Asian Contemporary Art Conference, Taipei; Icastica, Arezzo; Academia di Belle Arte, Florence; Casa Masaccio, San Giovanni Valdarno; NGMA, Mumbai and Bengaluru; Space Studio, Baroda; Tarq, Mumbai; Goldsmiths, University of London; and Tate Modern, London among others. She has also served as the Programme Director at Space Studio, Baroda, the curator of the 2017 Kathmandu Triennale symposium and the Photo Kathmandu Residency 2018, and is on the advisory board of the 2020 Kathmandu Triennale.

## **About Partners**

Founded in 2014, **Kommune** is India's premier platform for great art and great artists, known for bringing people closer through the power of stories. In the last 6 years, we have given a stage to over 5000 writers and storytellers across 15+ cities in India, and are the creators of one of India’s largest spoken word festivals - Spoken Fest.

**Avid Learning**, the cultural philanthropy arm of the Essar Group founded in 2009 has, over the past decade, grown into one of Mumbai’s leading public programming platforms and is firmly entrenched in the country’s wider cultural ecosystem. Our thoughtfully curated and diverse events embrace the spirit of collaboration to bring together the best of Indian and international writers, artists, intellectuals, cultural experts, policymakers and industry leaders across Visual Art, Literature, Culture and Heritage, Education, Design & Technology and the

Performing Arts through engaging and dynamic formats like panel discussions, workshops & master classes, roundtables, lecture demonstrations, festival platforms, symposiums & conferences, multidisciplinary performances and walkthroughs. To date, AVID has conducted over 1250 programs and connected with more than 150,000 individuals, a widely eclectic group of life-long learners including students, patrons, practitioners, influencers, thought leaders and cultural & creative enthusiasts in Mumbai, Delhi, Jaipur, Bangalore, Goa and Gujarat. We have also made our mark internationally, with events and collaborations in Dubai and New York. We regularly collaborate and partner with institutions, organisations and initiatives like the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), (CSMVS) Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), one of the apex bodies that impact cultural policy and the creative sector as a whole. We have been at the helm of programming at the Royal Opera House, Mumbai India's only surviving Opera House since its reopening in 2016. We believe in the importance of arts for social change and we regularly offer our support and platforms for Social Advocacy. In April 2020, we launched **AVID Online**, an online further learning campaign on our social media platforms for our followers to engage with a range of varied topics across the breadth of the arts. Our eclectic faculty of experts, thought leaders, practitioners and innovators continue to share their learnings, expertise and knowledge on our social media platforms with tailored content featured weekly for AVID's online community and beyond. In collaboration with long-term and new partners, we have since dimensionalised the campaign by re-introducing our existing offline formats and IPs and enhancing them for digital engagement. We have taken our content live with engaging masterclasses and virtual panel discussions and also built robust tangential campaigns and series in support of worthy causes and highlighting topical issues. To keep updated on our programmes, like us on <https://www.facebook.com/avidlearning/>, follow us on <https://twitter.com/AvidLearning> and Instagram: @avidlearning or log onto <http://www.avidlearning.in> #LearningNeverStops!

Watch all past AVID Online episodes on our dedicated YouTube Playlist:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLYt7Q44R5xkd4dRefvV3nFloOHEePgLAZ>