

# Once Upon a Time... Ever After

## A digital panographic panorama, 2001

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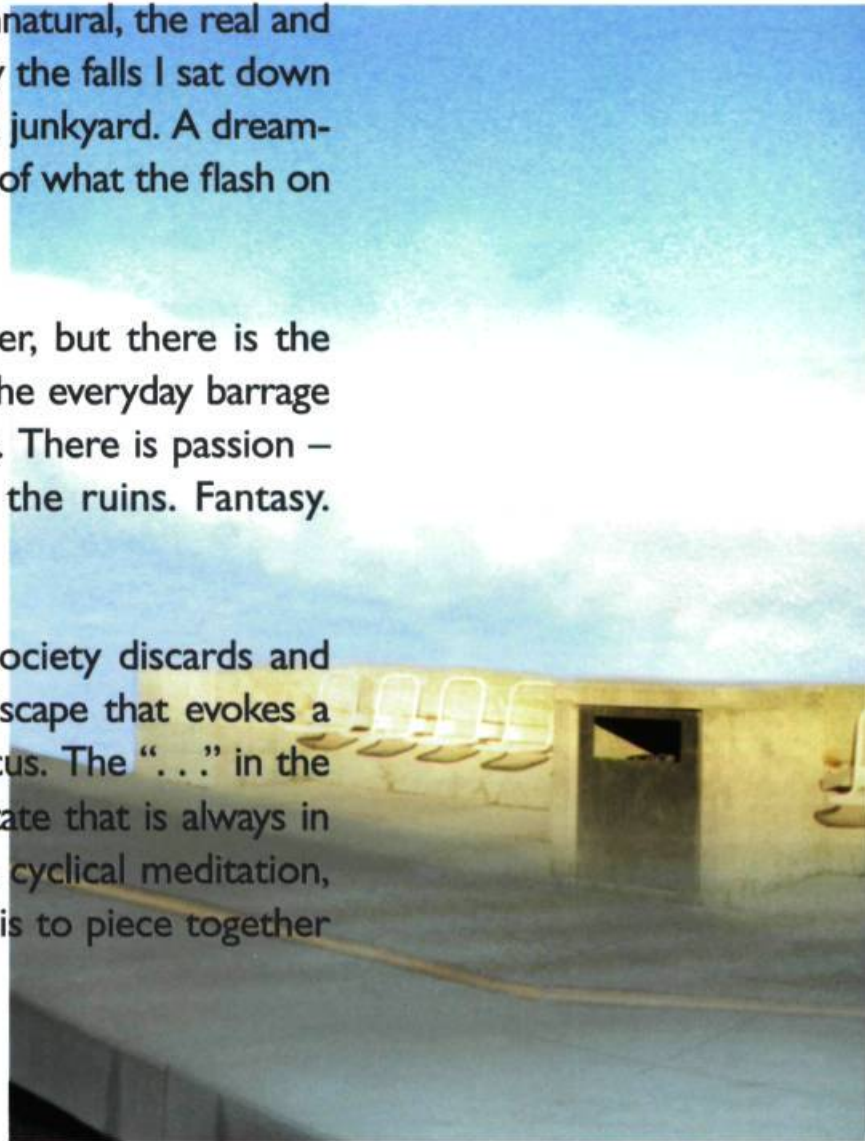
Résumé de l'article

Sur le plan visuel, je m'intéresse aux choses dont se débarrasse notre société, à la façon dont elles s'accumulent laissant derrière elles un paysage apocalyptique qui évoque une sensation de mémoire, tour à tour nette et floue. Cela a à voir avec la douceur et l'angoisse. Le naturel et le non-naturel, le réel et l'imaginaire composent un horizon délavé. Une image de ce que voit le flash de mon appareil-photo. ... L'oeuvre est une méditation cyclique; elle n'a ni début ni fin. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est de rassembler des tessons et fragments sous forme de récit.

Under the digital disney sky, the debris of contemporary life consolidates, piled together into a postcard from the edge. It is all sweetness and anxiety. The natural and unnatural, the real and the imagined, becoming one watery vista. By the falls I sat down and wept. This is my theme park. An MRI. A junkyard. A dream-  
scape. A whisper in a loud room. A picture of what the flash on my camera sees.

The work does not speak to the viewer, but there is the shock of recognition. It creates the noise, the everyday barrage of disconnected noise, of screaming images. There is passion – I can't bring myself to say love – among the ruins. Fantasy. Machinery.

Visually, I am interested in what our society discards and how this leaves us with an apocalyptic landscape that evokes a sense of memory, wavering in and out of focus. The “. . .” in the title refers to the murky “present” – that state that is always in oscillation and unsteadiness. This work is a cyclical meditation, it has no beginning or end, for what I want is to piece together shards of fragments into a narrative.



## RAMONA **RAMLOCHAND**

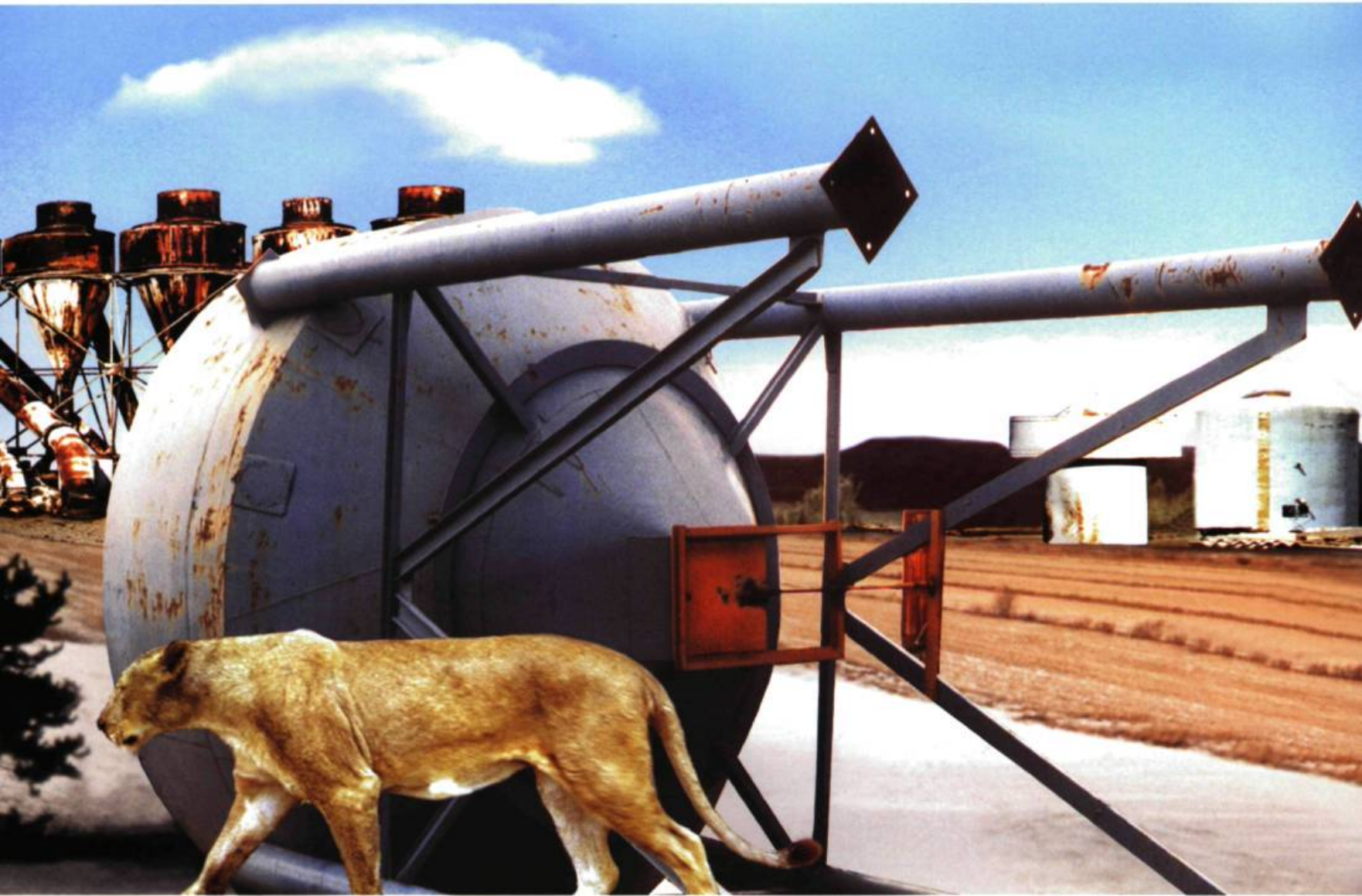
Once Upon a Time . . . Ever After

a digital photographic panorama, 2001















# Fragmentation

"that anxious but strangely beautiful state"<sup>1</sup>

## MEDITATION ONE

I find myself increasingly caught in fragments that shift me in and out of focus to the point that I am feeling adrift in a sea of endless possibilities and, at the same time, nothingness. I don't think life can be anything but a series of fragments. Homi Bhabha says, "Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present' for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post': postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism."<sup>2</sup> He is speaking of a sense of displacement, a diasporic edginess, in which the mainstream has broken apart into small pieces. I feel this idea more than comprehend it. Or it is simply a convenient excuse to justify my feelings of listlessness and procrastination.

My artwork is all about filtering light into a dialogue about place, "being here" and "being there," thus creating virtual "non-places" in which to exist. It is through this reflection of life and light that I can begin to see a glimmering of the whole. I desire this "whole-ness," the possibility of completion, of holistic integration.

As artists, aren't we trying to convey or mirror some part of ourselves into the environment around us, like an extended hand reaching out in vain to communicate something to anyone who would listen, see, or feel? We are also caught in the perpetual cycle, simultaneously constructing and deconstructing ourselves in the process, which can sometimes lead to isolated esoteric alleyways that no one really wants to enter.

In its colourful play of light, fragmentation – in its chaotic, irrational, meaningless, unjust, and spectacular present-ness – suffers from amnesia, or at least the inability to assemble dreamy memories into a coherent narrative – is both life and death. It is sacred and profane. Wickedly beautiful. We can hardly bear its beauty.

The conundrum becomes greater when I muse over fragments that extend into the imagination and feed the creative output. I encounter ethical situations in which "true," or "right," depends on the context. There is no stable, "real" self under these constant changes. Only the feeling that there are a bunch of "us" who feel and act the same way. Self-identity is not lodged solely in the individual but is shared within a community. To echo Bhabha, we are displaced, lost from a sense of self and community and from what that means. I am not saying that I want to belong to any community or, increasingly, race, but I am trying to encompass my world into "one world."

If we champion the protean, live-and-let-live ideal of multicultural harmony, is this too passive an acceptance of the unjust, crazy fact of the world? To praise the beauty of separation is one thing, to practise it is another. Because I live among the rich merchants of economic exploitation, I am, indeed, a beneficiary of whatever largesse they throw my way, but can I morally embrace fragmentation, which is really a mask

for gross inequities? Is the world/self fragmented, or is it vertically segmented? Is the postmodern pastiche and acceptance of the wonderful spectral play of light really an excuse for inaction? Or is it a spectacle to please the eye of the gallery stroller, who window-shops, consumes, judges, critiques, loves, hates, and indifferently dismisses?

## MEDITATION TWO

I am not a politician or a social reformer. I'm just an artist, like all artists. At one moment we are the hero/heroine, the subject of the work, but we are wrought with contradictions, paradoxical images of otherness, exotica, yearning, loss, the desire for unity. These are my experiences, or at least what I have seen of the world, interlaced, seeking absolution, congruity, and meaning.

Should I seek to synthesize fragments? Isn't the play of light, the multi-coloured, multi-ethnic, multiple shattering of things really the paradoxical, irrational, vulgar, beautiful moment of life? To make it cohere, to make sense, to rationalize, would be to destroy it.

Our society is taken up with choices – scraps of data and statistics that can be useful at times, but are for the most part superfluous and inconsequential. The ghostly markers of difference that form our identity become seamlessly interlaced when we download ourselves into our computers. Surfing the Net becomes a nomadic wandering filled with virtual mirages and never-ending elusive trails. We become like deer caught in the headlights of data hurled at us from every direction, leaving us startled in the present by the magnitude of past histories and the endless possibilities that lay ahead. We are infused with something "real" when, in fact, it is intangible, and ephemeral. We end up looking for a way to "defragment" our brains the same way that we "defragment" the hard drive on our computers to clean up the bits and bytes.

I wonder if I am only reinventing fragments of my memories into a "reality" that over time becomes my "truth." Am I, then, only taking snapshots of my interior self, which no longer belongs to a particular space but sits in a state of oscillation and unsteadiness? What this bears resemblance to is a kind of postmodern *masala* (to use the Indian term for the blending of various spices), one generated not by a theory but by the vagaries of my own life.

**Ramona Ramlochand**

1. Thomas Kellein, *Hiroshi Sugimoto – Time Exposed* (exhibition catalogue) (New York: Edition Hansjorg Mayer, 1995), p. 12.

2. Homi K. Bhabha, *Location of Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 3.

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## Résumé

Sur le plan visuel, je m'intéresse aux choses dont se débarrasse notre société, à la façon dont elles s'accumulent, laissant derrière elles un paysage apocalyptique qui évoque une sensation de mémoire, tour à tour nette et floue. Cela a à voir avec la douceur et l'angoisse. Le naturel et le non-naturel, le réel et l'imaginaire composent un horizon délavé. Une image de ce que voit le flash de mon appareil-photo. ... L'œuvre est une méditation cyclique; elle n'a ni début ni fin. Ce qui m'intéresse, c'est de rassembler des tessons et fragments sous forme de récit.