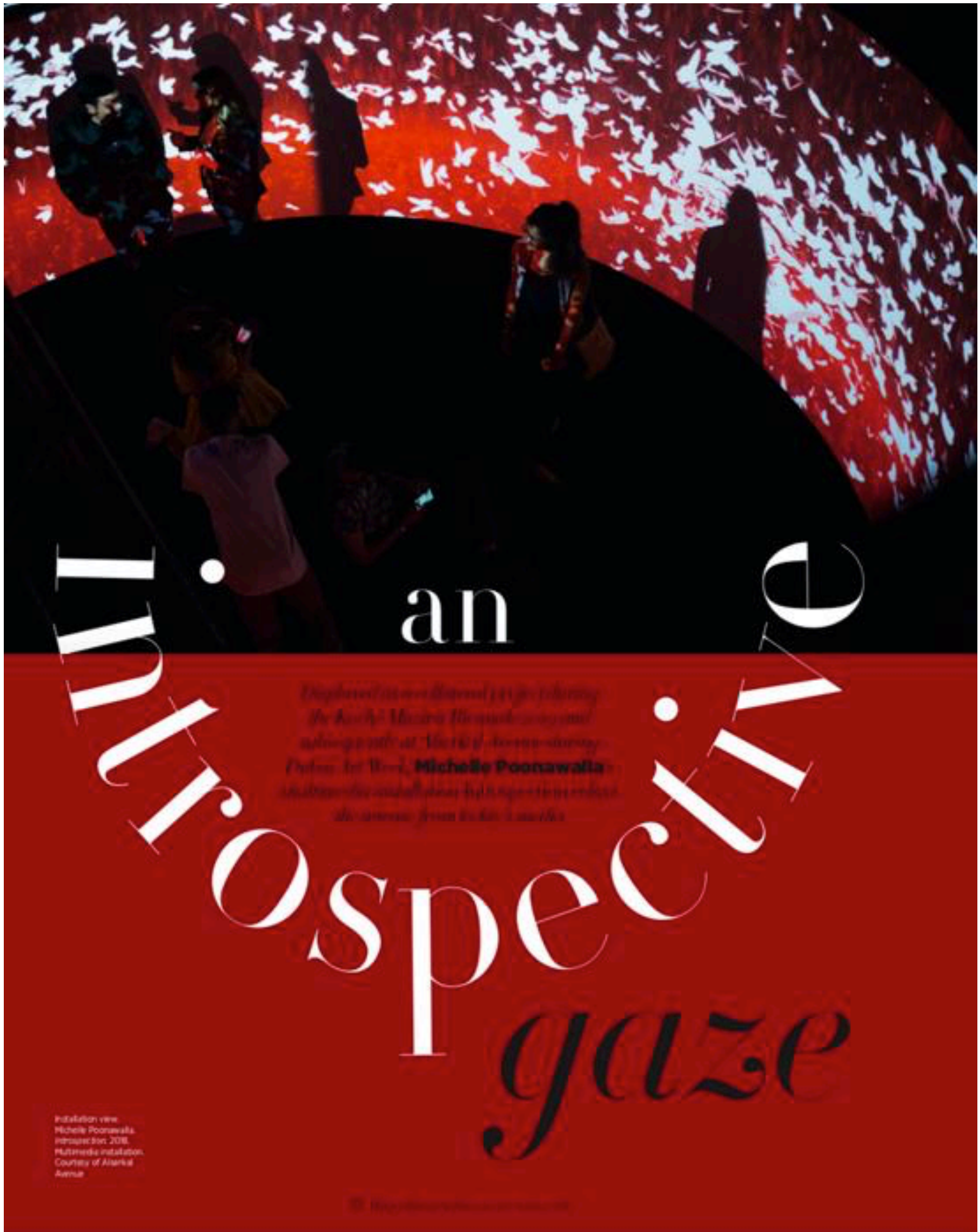


BAZAAR ART



Installation view.
Michelle Poonawalla.
Introspection, 2018.
Multimedia installation.
Courtesy of Alserkal
Avenue

Art NEWS

A mass of white butterflies fills a circular screen and fly amidst a rainy terrain. The viewer stands in the centre, the white butterflies populate even more and we encounter a momentary sense of calm—a pause before the newscasts begin again, relaying the subjects of trauma and horror that have come to populate the mental space of our everyday lives. Artist Michelle Poonawalla combined audio clips from newscasts and ambient sounds to create an otherworldly sensorium. “I think of *Introspection* as a work that has a strong global resonance,” says the artist. “The work addresses our increasing apathy with 24-hour news cycles, as people are confronted with images of disaster or violence we learn to move past them without giving them consideration.” Visitors immediately are immersed within Poonawalla’s world, prompted to reflect on the upsetting subjects relayed and hopefully, will leave, as the artist intends, with new ideas and a desire for change and hope.

“I’ve always been an artist ever since I was young,” says Poonawalla. “I couldn’t tell my father when I was young that I wanted to be an artist because he didn’t think that was a serious thing to do. My grandfather was an architect and a painter but he never sold his work because he didn’t want to be governed by money.” An intellect and theorist, he made his own colour alphabet and wrote numerous scripts on art. “He made his own technique with oil painting that called his ‘fake proof technique’ and no one in the whole world knew how to do it,” says Poonawalla. When he was in his 80s, he shared the technique with his granddaughter, Poonawalla. “One day he told me how to do it and I am the only one he shared this with in his lifetime. It’s a very special technique and no painting can ever be created in the same manner. You

apply oil paint and work in the image you want with a palette knife then you mix all the paint with a brush so that at one point the entire canvas is one colour. You then take a ruler and make incisions on the thick layer of paint, gradually revealing the image. The process is quite magical!” Poonawalla still uses the same technique now in her paintings but increasingly mixes this with different media, though her grandfather’s legacy continues to influence her to this day.

Over the years Poonawalla has been compelled to follow her passion and become an artist. “How could my grandfather share his secret with me and I do nothing with it?” she asks. Her artistic career, which began with installations and painting, has now moved towards working in multimedia installation work as well as painting - her work focuses on the beauty of the world around her as well as touching relevant subjects, incorporating her signature motif of butterflies. Her first show in Delhi, *What If You Fly?* encompassed works on canvas with digital mapping portraying butterflies. “I was working on the butterfly pieces and the curator Swapan Seth encouraged me to try my hand at sculpture and work in other media. I am one of

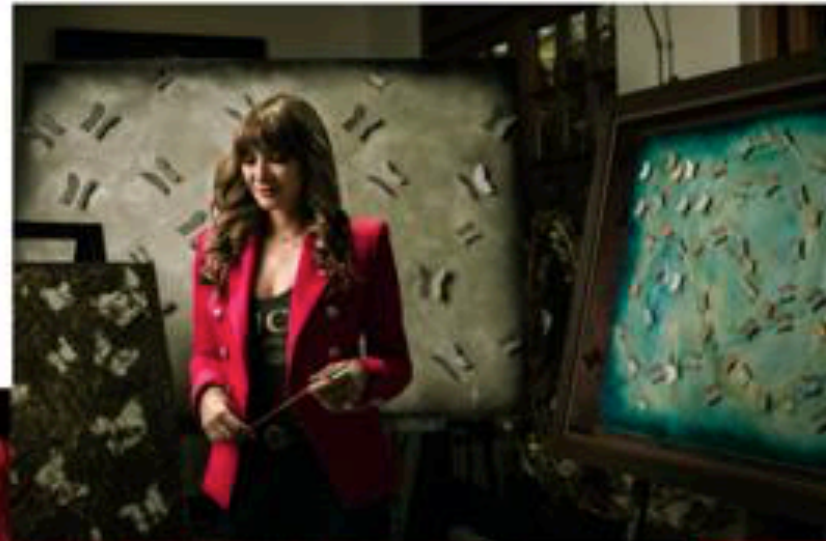
those people who likes to be pushed. I like my shows to have a bit of drama and I want people to leave in awe.” She came across video mapping, which allows the artist’s subject matter to move and come alive. “It opened a new horizon to my art practice,” she says. She subsequently showed at Jehangir Art Gallery in Mumbai, displaying her paintings alongside those of her grandfather’s.

Next was the showing of *Introspection* as a collateral project at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale in December 2019. “I wanted to find a topic that would touch everyone and was universal and relevant,” she says. “It has to be what we are all going through—this terror, the bloodshed, and the violence. In every part of the world there is this fear and everyone has felt it at some point. I wanted the installation to focus around this.” But there’s more. *Introspection* wasn’t just to show the violence. It was also about offering hope and that’s something Poonawalla really hopes to achieve through her art. “People need to stop and start thinking about where humanity is going.” ■

Introspection will next be on display as a guest project at Saatchi Art Fair at the Saatchi Gallery in London in September 2019

IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND ALSERKAL AVENUE, DUBAI. WORDS BY REBECCA A ANNE PROCTOR

Right: Michelle Poonawalla. Courtesy of the artist



Left: Michelle Poonawalla, *Introspection*, 2018. Courtesy of Alserkal Avenue

