

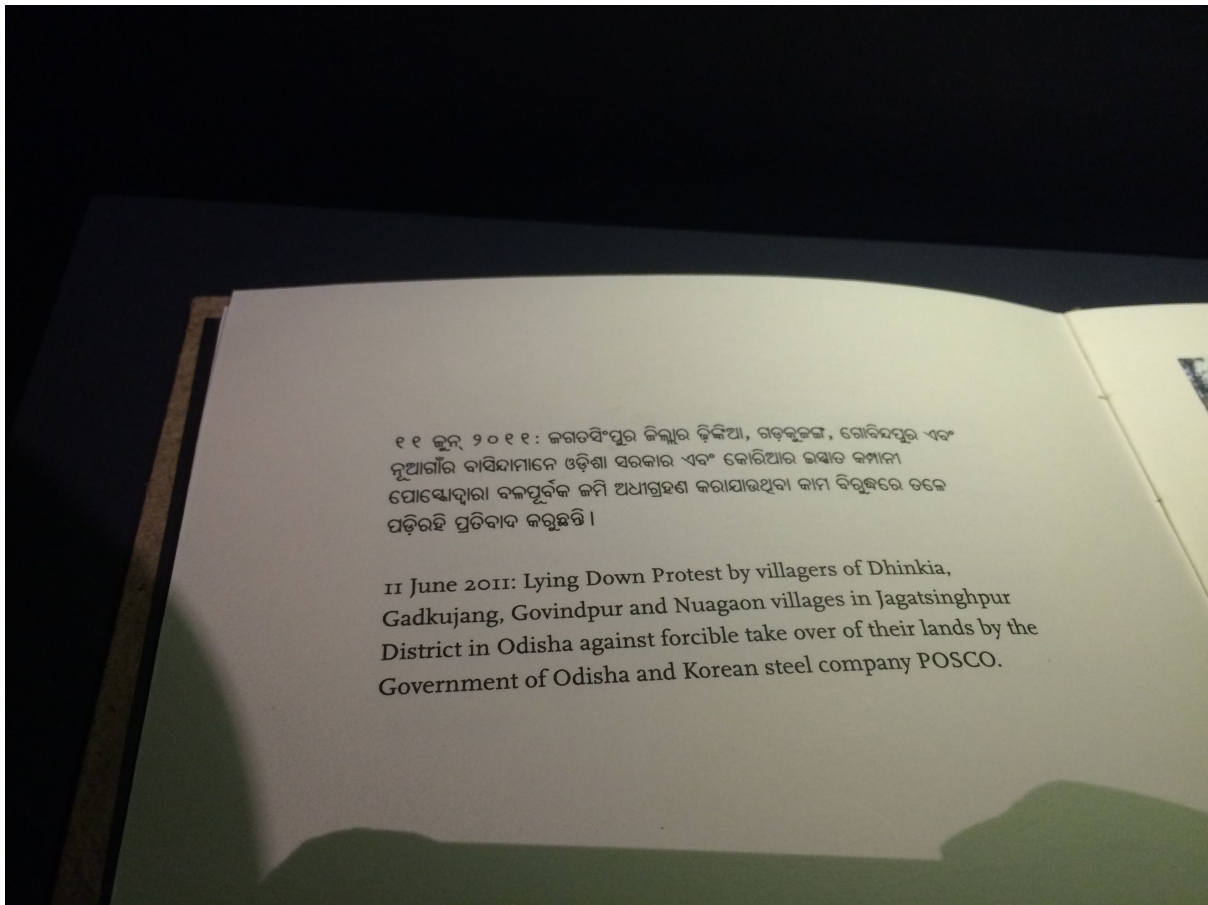
Honestly, I did not completely understand the artwork, *The Sovereign Forest*. I understood that it was talking about the political and social issues in India and its relation to the steel-making company situated in South Korea, POSCO. I only knew this piece of information from several newspaper articles found below:



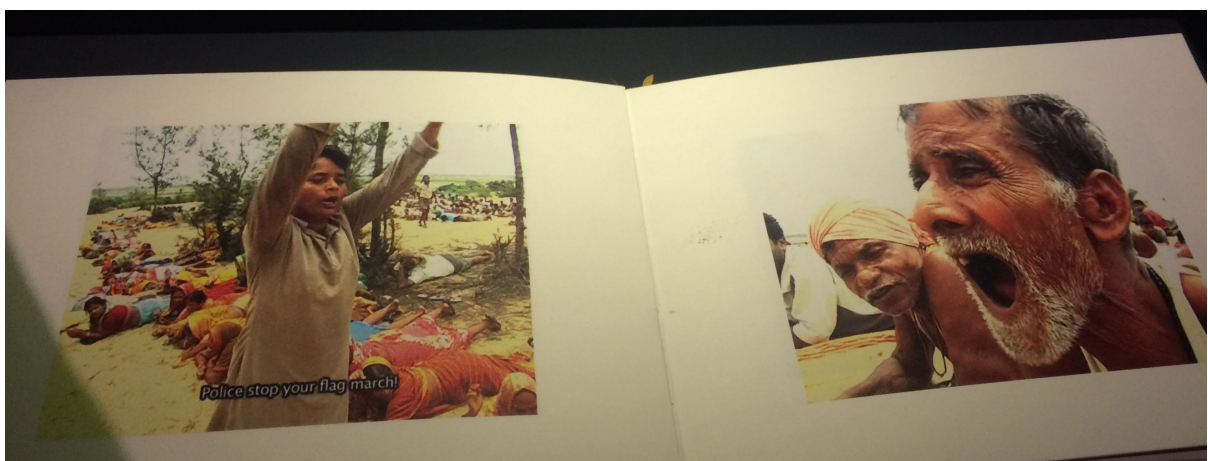
This is called Selections From the Evidence Archive. These evidence come in any form, from photographs, lists of residents, land records and tax receipts, proofs of occupancy, maps of villages etc.

I think the whole experience of reading the articles and looking at the pictures was really cool because it felt very chronological and hence I was able to receive the information with good flow and rhythm. And it helped me understand the whole overview of the issue.

Another artwork that was memorable was the artwork in The Seed Room. The book that stood out was the *Photo Album 1: The Lying Down Protest*.



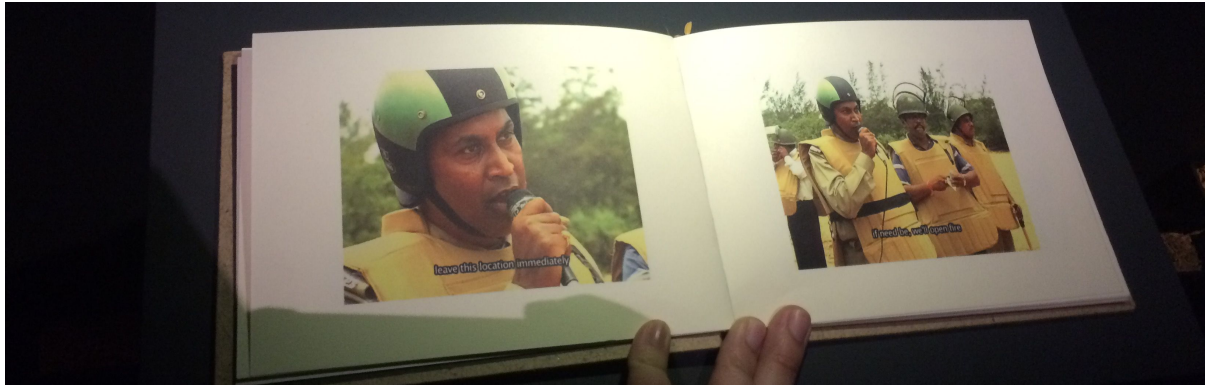
The book contains images of a protest in 2011 by the villagers against the police who wanted their land on behalf of POSCO and the government Odisha.



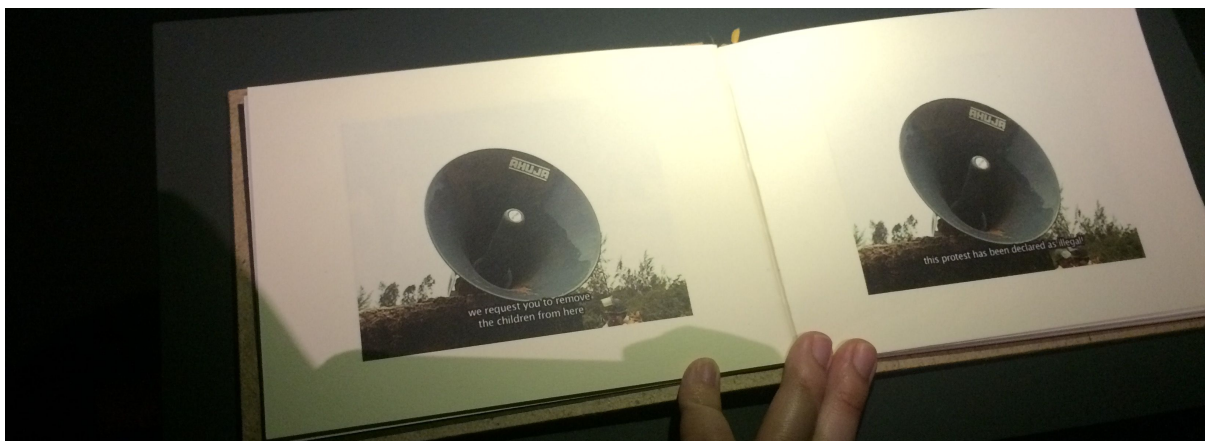
"Police stop your flag march!"

The images touched me.

To see such hurt, anger and fear in faces of the people of all gender and age, made these political and social issues very real to me even though I do not have enough knowledge on topic. An issue that felt very far to me was instantly brought closer to me through seeing these emotions.



“Leave this location immediately”
“If need be, we’ll open fire”



“We request you to remove the children from here”
“This protest has been declared illegal!”

After seeing such emotions, I immediately felt how unfair it was to these villagers. And looking at how the police treated them made me feel even worse.

CONCLUSION

Outside the gallery, lay a heavy book about *The Sovereign Forest*. In one of the first few pages, I saw a sentence that summed up what everyone should be taking away from this visit.

It said, “I have learned so much, that just being kind is not enough, that caring is not enough, that understanding is not enough, that doing something to help is not enough. But, to listen and to see.”

After the visiting the gallery, I felt that I still did not understand the whole issue properly. Because of that, I felt a bit bad. I felt I was lacking many things. Many of which was my knowledge about the whole world. I felt ignorant and was very subtle in feeling ashamed of myself.

But the quote brought upon to me that, what's more important than being kind or being understanding is to first realise.

To realise that the issue was even there in the first place. And that was exactly what I did after my visit to *The Sovereign Forest*.



The Sovereign Forest in Bhubaneswar



The Sovereign Forest is far more than an art project. It enters the realms of multiple truths, relating a story that even the perpetrators could listen to. I first met Amar Kanwar in 2006, in relation to his work *The Lightning Testimonies* (2007). That work is a multichannel video installation that explores the history of sexual violence against women in the Indian subcontinent, from the abduction and abuse of thousands of women during the partition of India in 1947, to the powerful antirape protests in Manipur in 2004. He tells these stories in the most delicate and sensitive ways. The response has been uncanny. Honor had somehow been restored as the memory of the victims was made eternal by the work. It also broke the sense of isolation that survivors had experienced, especially acute in some cases, where survivors were ostracized, *The Lightning Testimonies* opened new ways of understanding and sensitization.

Amar is far too modest a man to take too much credit. We continued to speak about films and the important role the medium plays in finding new ways of seeing. Amar then made *The Torn First Pages* (2004–08) and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary supported the making of this film, though we had supported Amar in the past, the involvement with this work ran deeper. The work documents the resistance to the military junta in Burma and is inspired by the pro-democracy movement led by Aung San Suu Kyi which triggered huge clashes with the authorities. *The Torn First Pages* is one of the most beautiful and elegant works in the whole Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary collection. It tells a powerful story about the struggle of the Burmese people, again made with a rare sensitivity.

I could not wait for the next project. It was *The Scene of Crime*, a beautifully crafted, slow-paced, and immersive film. Amar has been filming the resistance of local communities to the industrial interventions that have been taking place in the state of Odisha since 1999. In this war by the state against its own land and people, the film takes you to a place that is being systematically pillaged by mining and other industries. A place that a viewer cannot help but love - the rice fields, the river, the trees . . . This film marked the beginning of his work *The Sovereign Forest*, which premiered at documenta 13 and was shown at TBA21–Augarten in 2013. More importantly, and even more beautifully, it is shown as a permanent exhibition in Bhubaneswar, the capital of Odisha. There, it has become a unique place of sorts, a place where the deaths of demonstrators are recognized for what they are: brutal murders. A place where victims of this outrage can come and remember and find solidarity in their fight to preserve their ancestors' land, to find understanding and inspiration to continue, a place to leave a mark, to be heard, to feel heard. The exhibition also draws many visitors, raising awareness and deepening understanding of the depth and scale of *The Scene of Crime*.

Thank you, Amar, for allowing me to be part of your journey and the works that have emerged. I have learned so much, that just being kind is not enough, that caring is not enough, that understanding is not enough, that doing something to help is not enough. But, to listen and to see.