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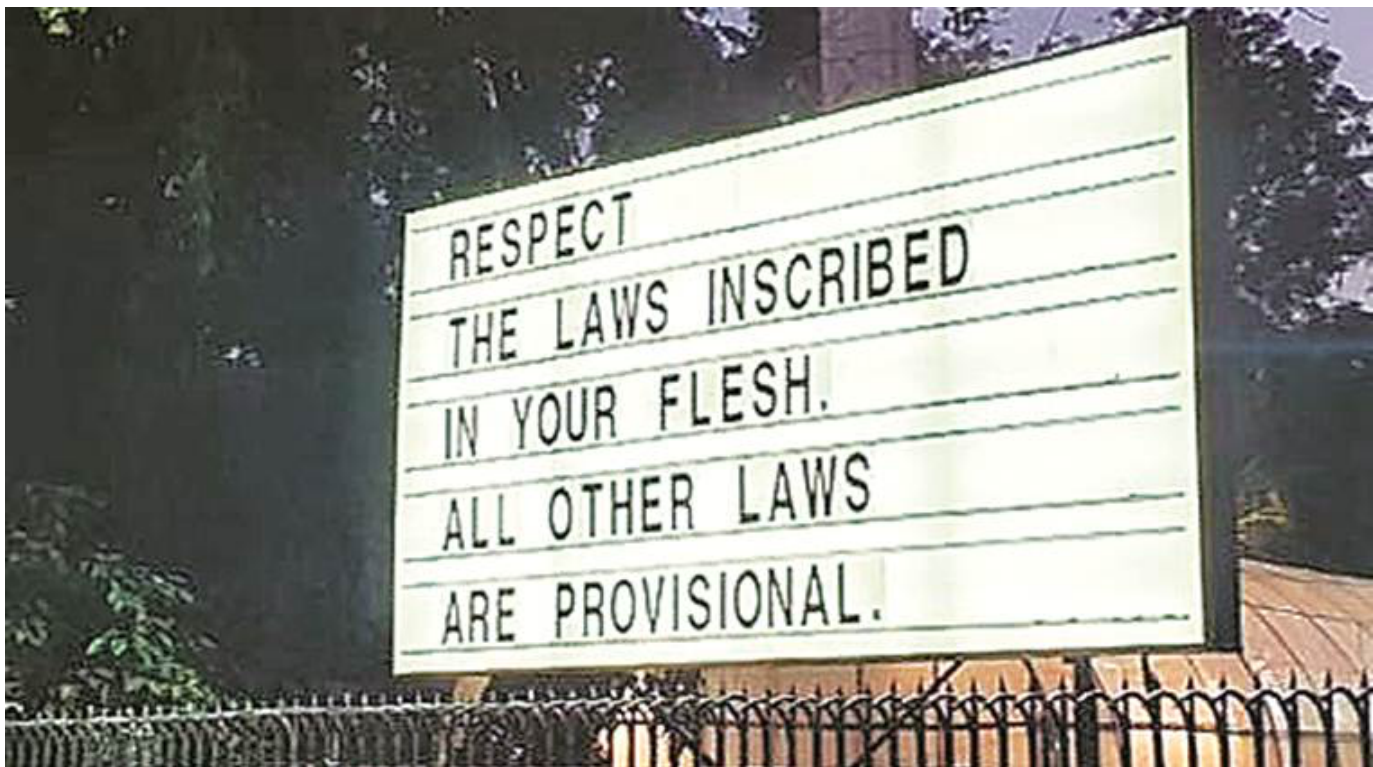
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# All the world a stage: Artist urges protest through KG Marg billboard in Delhi

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Written by **Dipanita Nath** | New Delhi | Updated: March 2, 2020 6:30:42 pm




The project will end on February 29. (Express Photo)

For performance-based artist Amitesh Grover, the city is a stage and its people astute actors. Since October 19, he has assumed the role of the director and sent out instructions through a giant billboard on Kasturba Gandhi Marg in central Delhi. Grover's intention is not to prepare a play but to rehearse the people of the Capital for a real-life performance of protest, dissent and resistance.

On the day the city came out to vote, the billboard said, "Run / through a museum / across a monument / along the parliament / run or else". After the election, it said, "Wonder / if the centre / and the periphery / will ever want to / meet". Three days later, the message was "If you watch / the movement / only from afar / how will you know / what makes it move?" On February 18, the billboard said, "Respect / The laws inscribed / in your flesh / all other laws / are provisional".

Each day brings a different note but in the form of an ambiguous poem written by

him. “I wanted to help the Indian citizen, who is thinking about resistance, to begin their resistance. It is up to them to interpret the instructions that are being given on the board but if they do what the board is asking them to, they would have started something,” says Grover.




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Titled ‘100 Velocity Pieces’, the project is a part of a cultural initiative called Five Million Incidents of the Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan in collaboration with Raqs Media Collective. The project has been running for 100 days.

The message usually starts with an irregular verb such as Build, Dig, Make, Seek. Then, it looks at how bodies can perform simple acts of rebellion. “Very often, powerful acts of resistance are not spectacular. Look at protest sites and what you will see is that all people are doing is sitting,” says the director. To decide the texts, he turned to the notes he had scribbled over the years during rehearsal and thoughts he had written down. The texts are proofed and arranged by dramaturg Sarah Mariam. An instruction Grover once gave to an actor during rehearsal to crawl close to the floor has, on the billboard, become a message about staying close to the ground “to sniff out the state’s blueprint or the master-plan which we, too often, fail to see from afar”.

A faculty member at the National School of Drama in Delhi, Grover creates performances across media, ranging from installations to visual art to theatre. In his latest performance, Table Radica, Grover presents the story of Habib Tanvir, a legendary theatre actor and director, to audiences seated at a long dining table who are served food, photographs, letters and philosophy related to Tanvir’s radical life. For another project, Grover worked as a fake employee with one of India’s biggest

technology companies for six months and created art out of disruptions of capitalism. 'On Mourning' puts a Dalit woman, whose profession is to mourn at funerals, on stage as a performer.

"I have always been interested in critique of power and the ways in which it happens. Power structures could be external and visible or dark, invisible and internalised in our bodies. During rehearsal, we see bodies breaking and writhing in pain because of the habits of power and privilege they are used to. In a rehearsal, each instruction is meant to unpack or dismantle one habit of the body. What we are attacking is not a structure outside but a regime or discipline that you carry, which needs to be rebelled against. The performance instructions on the billboard do that," he says. The first instruction from the billboard was "You precariat / philosophical public / come work sweat / stink rehearse / now here or else".

Many viewers think of the text as comments on immediate events but Grover adds that he had written most of the instructions long before the city erupted in protests. "The idea was to think about the text as poetry, not as a comment of what is happening right now, but as a constant battle between control and freedom, resistance and oppression, almost like a performance manifesto," he adds.

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