



# motiroti





motiroti / The Builders Association's *Alladeen* was presented as a cross media performance for stage, music video and a web project. It toured internationally (2002-05) to numerous venues and received an OBIE Award in New York. Photo: Simone Lynn.



**motiroti** is a London based arts organisation led by artistic director Ali Zaidi. For over ten years the company has made internationally acclaimed and award winning art that transforms relationships between people, communities and spaces. **motiroti** works at the forefront of ever-changing global social realities, challenging and teasing perceptions of artists, institutions and audiences alike.

Working with a range of collaborators

within visual and live art, new technology and socially engaged practice, our projects are accessible to a wide audience through multiple layers of interpretation. We foster the development of a lifelong learning culture. Learning and art production are part of the same process, and offer equally potent opportunities to inspire and develop a dynamic exchange between artists and communities.

**motiroti is one of the few arts organisations truly to stretch between international cutting edge work and the lives of people in their own communities. They gain their inspiration from life in all its rich forms – it shows. If only more arts had this breadth of vision.** Jenny Edwards, CEO Homeless Link

This page, dockwise from top right: *Harvest it!* (2007). Kakatsitsi Drummers performing at the autumn festival in Myatt's Fields Park. *Harvest it!* Vassall Voices Children's Choir. *The Seed The Root* (1995). From a series of images installed in Brick Lane. *Alladeen*: screen grab from the website with interviews from call centre operators.



DESIGN: PETRA GOEBEL



PHOTO: ALI ZAIDI

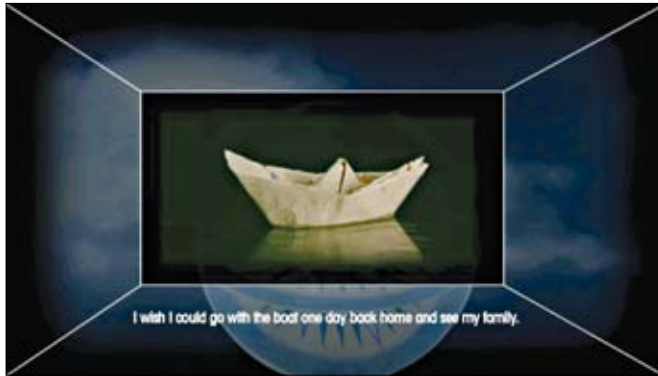


PHOTO: ANDREW WHITTUCK



PHOTO: ANDREW WHITTUCK

Some of the people **motiroti** has worked with SU ANDI MINA ANWAR BARBY ASANTE CHRISTOPHE BERTHONNEAU SONIA BOYCE AJAY CHHABRA CHANTAL COADY DBOX DESPERATE OPTIMISTS DOLLY DHINGRA NINA EDGE FEMI ELUFOWOJU JNR SHAHRAM ENTEKHABI TONY FEGAN SALVATORE FORINO NORMAN FRISCH GUILLERMO GOMEZ PEÑA SHOBNA GULATI PEN HADOWS BHAJAN HUNJAN LAURA GODFREY-ISAACS SUMANT JAYAKRISHNAN PETER JENKINSON NAVTEJ JOHAR INDIRA JOSHI ISAAC JULIEN ABDULLAH KARSHI MIRA KAUSHIK LOIS KEIDEN AKRAM KHAN KEITH KHAN NUSRAT FATEH ALI KHAN REEM KILANI PRAVESH KUMAR SOFIE LAYTON SARAT MAHARAJ ROBBIE MCCAULEY KOBENA MERCER ZAYD MINTY SURINA NARULA GAVIN O'SHEA STEVE OUDITT H PATTEN VANESSA RICHARDS SUNETRA SARKER DANIEL SAUL SCANNER ZINEB SEDIRA GAURI SHARMA TRIPATHI SHRI TALVIN SINGH BARNABY STONE SWARAJ GILANE TWADROSS CATHERINE UGWU NINA WADIA SHANE WALTENER MARIANNE WEEMS BENJAMIN ZEPHANIAH



*Priceless* (2006)  
Video grabs from  
the installations  
created for the  
Science Museum  
and the Serpentine  
Gallery.



**A completely new process of working with institutions giving the museum and its audience a different perspective.**

*Priceless* (2006) Hannah Redler, Head of Arts, Science Museum

**A successful culmination of an outstanding project and we are immensely proud to have presented it.**

*Priceless* (2006) Julia Peyton-Jones, Director, Serpentine Gallery

Some of the places where **motiroti** has been seen ARNOLFINI GALLERY BARBICAN BBC BONN BIENNALE BRICK LANE BROADGATE CARLTON



PHOTO: ALI ZAIDI

Right: *Plain Magic* (1999-2001), a traveling exhibition that took art out of the conventional gallery space and into the heart of melas and festivals nationwide. Below: *motiroti/dbox's cutout* (2005). Video grab from the triptych installation shown in galleries around the UK.



DIRECTOR: ALI ZAIDI

**motiroti's work is like being immersed in a wide-screen cinematic experience with surround sound. Their thoughtful and beautiful projects inspire and tickle the sensibilities of an exceptionally wide range of audiences.**

Shekhar Kapur, Film Maker

PHOTO: SHANE WALTNER

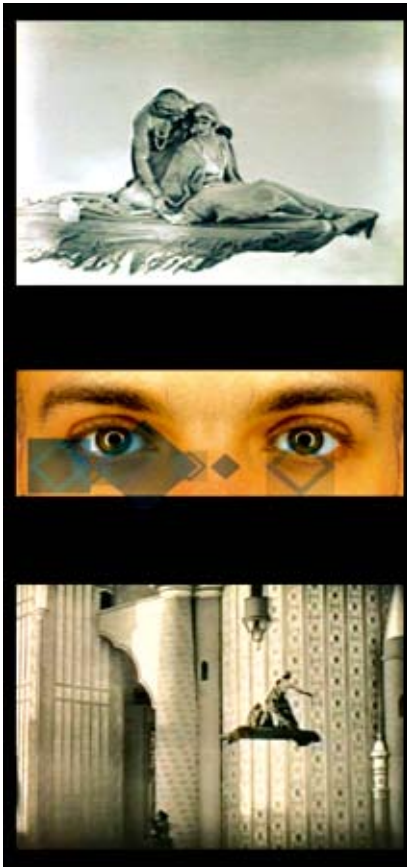


**motiroti actively engages individuals and communities with place and context. Translating these engagements into works of beauty, created as a result of the agency of the participants...a form of radical art for the modern consumer age.**

Zayd Minty,  
Cultural Producer  
and Curator



PHOTO: ALI ZAIDI



## motiroti Imagining new cultures

For over a decade **motiroti** has staged a series of highly charged events that defy simple categorisation in terms of contemporary art, performance, entertainment or community-based arts project. Their work encompasses all these categories and yet is not singularly any one of them, involving as it does the use of every possible media from the high technologies of the internet and multi-media video projection, music and sound installation to the more traditional arts of painting, photography, performance and theatre.

Facing page: *Harvest it!* (2007). Embroidery by project participant. Over 150 participants contributed to the creation of a giant tablecloth on the theme of harvest. *Build* (2000). Three sculptural houses were constructed at Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, embracing the views of 1600 young millennium volunteers from across the UK.  
This page: *Alladeen* (2002). Grabs from music video.

## Collaboration, participation, inclusion

It is not simply a case of elaborating a project and 'presenting' it to a ready and waiting audience for 'consumption'. All of the projects directly involve the participation of the audience. The audience actively contribute to the work, both in terms of production and content. It is central to **motiroti's** concerns that invitation to participate is open to all.

The world was dramatically altered after the events of 9/11. There is an ever increasing Islamophobia and fear and suspicion of 'the foreigner'. **motiroti** produces work which challenges these enduring stereotypes, unpacking cultural identities, and highlighting commonalities shared by different communities. This approach is balanced by a willingness to focus on the particularities of different groups which are sometimes seen as being a single group. For example the term 'Asian' is often used as a blanket description for anyone from a single region, but this is a region which in fact contains a wide diversity of different religions, ethnic groups and cultures.

## A culture of collaboration

In collaboration with The Builders Association, *Alladeen* (2002) explored the cultural, social, political and philosophical consequences of call-centres being set up in India. Because we cannot see the person at the other end of the line there is space for imagination, fantasy and role-play that is mirrored in the Aladdin story. Call-centre operatives in Bangalore are taught about the culture of the country to which they are providing the answering service. So for instance, Anish – who will introduce himself to his British or American caller as ‘Andy’ – is very well acquainted with the latest football or baseball results, recent episodes of popular soap operas and major and minor news items from the popular press.

The myth of Aladdin retains its power because the same aspirations to wealth and success are just as powerful today; and no more so than in a city like Bangalore. Thousands of young men and women migrate from Bangalore to California’s ‘silicone valley’ to take up jobs in the high-tech and computer industries. This ‘brain drain’ exposes the population to the ways of the Western world, as does the recent

explosion of access to the world-wide-web through the spread of broadband. As soon as the operator enters the caller’s address they automatically call up the latest news stories relating to that city and can flow them into the conversation to give the caller a sense of cosy familiarity.

*Alladeen* is a perfect example of **motiroti**’s production methods, being not only a multi-media event combining film and theatre but also a music video and a

web based project, which amongst other things invited people to send wishes to the world-wide-web jinn (genie); these wishes were then projected onto the stage during the live performance. Importantly, **motiroti** worked closely with the call-centre employees before beginning work on the production, interviewing them about the job, listening in on calls and feeding all the knowledge gained from this close interaction into the final work.

*Cutout* (2005), is a remarkable video

Right:  
[www.alladeen.com](http://www.alladeen.com)  
(2003 – present)  
extended the project beyond theatres and worked as a virtual flying carpet. People can still submit their wishes.  
Facing page:  
**motiroti/dbox**’s *cutout II* projected onto the National Theatre’s fly tower for the Thames Festival 2006.



DESIGN: PETRA GOEBEL



triptych compiled from footage shot in six major cities across five continents. Because we are never certain which city we are looking at we get a sense of how globalised the world has become. What does someone from Auckland 'look like'? How is a shop in London different from one in Mumbai? Is the underground in New York that different to the one in Singapore? By using sophisticated video-editing software *cutout* questions the national characteristics of each city, replacing

them with a vision of a city that transcends geographical location and more truthfully reflects the multi-cultural nature of the urban environment today.

Silhouettes of individuals in vibrant colours cross and re-cross the multi-layered spatial collage of the cities, creating a complex vision, overwhelming but ultimately ecstatic, it evokes the mix of ethnic identities which make up today's major capitals. There are also shots of individuals, either relaxing in

their own homes or counting – in their own language – on their fingers. This universal ritual, learnt from an early age, is repeated throughout the world. It acts as a symbol of unity, connecting all people. The single-screen version, *cutout II*, was shown in public spaces to thousands of viewers, either via BBC Big Screens in major UK cities or on television, finally being projected onto the National Theatre's Lyttelton fly tower during the Thames Festival in 2006.



PHOTO: CRISTOBAL PALMA

FIELDS PARK NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ARTS, LAHORE NATIONAL GALLERY, CAPETOWN NATIONAL THEATRE'S FLYTOWER NATIONAL THEATRE, ISLAMABAD

## A culture of sharing

As part of *home's* Cooking Salon, Ali Zaidi, the Director of **motiroti**, staged *Cooked with Love* (2004) to celebrate his parent's forty-fifth wedding anniversary. He presented forty-five guests with forty-five dishes cooked with forty-five ingredients in a private house, amid his parent's wedding photos and stories about their life. **motiroti** (literally 'fat bread') often uses cooking and serving food as a way of involving the audience, a means to draw them into a project. Celebration, remembrance, ritual, companionship and sharing are all evoked by these events. In 2007 **motiroti** produced a similar event in Amsterdam. The banquet was accompanied by projections, performances and stories that explored Zaidi's life and influences. The ingredients and dishes presented also formed part of this autobiographical journey. On a more informal level **motiroti** have also held 'Creative Brunches' where artists, scientists, architects, and performers are invited to share their practice and ethos in a more intimate and friendly setting by the serving of food, making for a convivial and relaxed atmosphere.

*The Seed The Root* (1995) took place in



PHOTO: HARBANS CHADDA



PHOTO: ALI ZAIDI



...art making sense of life, enlarging the field of knowledge, altering experience.

*The Seed The Root*, Third Text

the East End of London and involved the local communities. The work was displayed in the windows of local shops and in a restaurant. Countering the promise of 'authentic Indian cuisine' the restaurateur Shams and his family served Bangladeshi cuisine as opposed to the usual menu catering to a British taste. Audiences debated questions of assimilation and authenticity, encouraging him to extend the menu. More than a decade later most of the restaurants on Brick Lane now proudly declaim themselves to be serving Bangladeshi cuisine. In these events food becomes a vehicle for deliciously communicating complex artistic and cultural ideas with simple sensuality.

Facing page: *Cooking with Love* presented at the LiteSide Festival, Amsterdam (2007). Autobiographical photo from family album. *The Seed The Root* (1995). Recipe card with image of restaurateur Shams with his mother and wife.

This page: *Cooked with Love* (2004). A dinner event at *home*, and culinary dedication to Ali Zaidi's parents 45th wedding anniversary.

Some of the cities where **motiroti** has been seen  
 AMSTERDAM ANTWERPEN  
 AUCKLAND BANGALORE  
 BARROW IN FURNESS  
 BELFAST BERGEN  
 BIRMINGHAM BOGOTÁ  
 BONN BRADFORD  
 BRISTOL CAPE TOWN  
 CHICAGO COPENHAGEN  
 CRÉTEIL DUBLIN  
 DURBAN GLASGOW  
 HOUSTON ISLAMABAD  
 JOHANNESBURG  
 LAHORE LEEDS LEICESTER  
 LILLE LONDON LOS  
 ANGELES MANCHESTER  
 MARNE-LA-VALLÉE  
 MELBOURNE MONTREAL  
 MUMBAI NEW YORK  
 OLDHAM ROME SAN  
 FRANCISCO SEATTLE  
 SINGAPORE TASHKENT  
 TORONTO WALSALL  
 WASHINGTON

The event wasn't about Diwali, nor Guy Fawkes, but it distilled the essence of a myriad of cultural rituals and transcended all expectations.

*Light it!* Lee Hill, Brixton Parks Officer

*Light it!* (2006).  
Image from a workshop using choreography and movement with different lights.



PHOTO: ALI ZAIDI

## A culture of participation

The audiences for *Light it!* (2006) and *Harvest it!* (2007) numbered over 3,000 local people who lived in the area near to Myatt's Fields Park, Camberwell in London. Festivals, both secular and religious, from many different cultures were brought together in *Light it!* from Diwali (literally 'festival of lights'), Eid and the Jewish Channukah (also known as the 'festival of lights') to the more secular Halloween, Guy Fawkes and the Mexican Day of the Dead. These events point out the similarities between communities as opposed to their differences. An important part of these **motiroti** projects was the artist-led workshops held before and involving hundreds of participants from schools and local community groups. This highlights two central remits of **motiroti**'s practice: a committed and dynamic interaction with local community groups and a strong learning programme.

This same approach is echoed in *Priceless* (2006). This event involved all the major institutions on Exhibition Road; from South Kensington Underground station itself, where **motiroti** worked on a project in collaboration with the station staff who came

from many different countries, to the V&A, Science Museum, Goethe Institute and the Serpentine Gallery. The public were intimately involved in group projects, workshops and guided tours. The emphasis was not so much on the priceless objects in the various museums and galleries, but on the 'priceless' stories, objects and contributions from the various communities, groups and individuals involved.

**motiroti's** pioneering approach to cultivating new and dynamic relationships between artists and the public, individuals and cultural institutions, different nationalities and different countries is poignantly demonstrated by the project *Plain Magic* (1999, 2000, 2001). As a strategy for placing contemporary art right in the heart of the public sphere **motiroti** set up marquees at melas and festivals throughout the UK. In order to welcome the public into the tent to view the art, the outside had been painted by billboard artist Kifait Hussain with images of popular media figures – chosen by the public. Having their instant photographs taken in front of their favourite celebrity engaged the audience in a direct and personal way. While the audience waited for their Polaroid to develop, they engaged with

the artworks within the tent. As they left, they were given a picture as a personal keepsake while **motiroti** kept a copy as part of an ever-growing collection of images of the visitors.



PHOTO: ALI ZAIDI



PHOTO: ANDREW WHITTUCK

Above: *Priceless* (2006). Graphic installations at South Kensington station's foot tunnel showing personal connections of Underground staff. Left: *Harvest it!* (2007). Young participants displaying chutneys and jams made with produce grown in the park for the project.

...art which really does deserve the 'public' tag. Lena Corner, *The Big Issue*



DESIGN: DAVID TORTORA

## Home and beyond

Ali Zaidi was born in India, grew up in Pakistan and now lives in Britain. His personal experience of not being fully accepted in each of these places raises issues about the meaning of 'home', what it is to 'belong' and what national identities and borders really mean. *60 x 60 Secs* (sixty one-minute films from three countries) is the first in a new series of works for **motiroti's** latest project, *360° Britain India Pakistan* (2007–2010). Using residencies, publications, exhibitions and collaborations *360°* will explore the relationships between three countries to demonstrate how art can be used to forge new relationships across cultures and open up different spaces for cultural exchange. The meaning of culture is changing, identities are transforming and stereotypes are unravelling. In *360°*, as in all of its projects, **motiroti** will identify and celebrate new ways of being, new connections and exciting possibilities for imagining new cultures.

RICHARD DYER © 2007

Richard Dyer is News Editor and London Correspondent of *Contemporary* magazine; Assistant Editor at *Third Text: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Art and Culture*; and Art Editor of *Wasafiri*, the magazine of international contemporary writing. His critical writing has appeared in *Contemporary*, *Frieze*, *Flash Art*, *Art Review*, *Art Press*, *Third Text*, *Wasafiri*, *The Independent*, *The Guardian*, *Time Out*, *Citizen K* and many other publications and catalogues. His recent publications include: *Dan Hays: Impressions of Colorado* (Southampton City Art Gallery, 2006); *Riddled With Light: Corpus Lumen: Susie Hamilton, 1996–2006* (Paul Stolper, 2006), *Zineb Sedira: Saphir* (Photographer's Gallery, 2006) and *Transitive Transduction: Breaking the Integument in the work of Tony Bevan* (Ben Brown Gallery, 2007).

Left: logo echoing the trilateral collaboration between Britain, India and Pakistan.

Facing page: selected panels from the Rich Mix cinemas designed by Ali Zaidi (2006). Celebrating the past and present of the migrant communities of Tower Hamlets, the designs are made from hundreds of textiles from different cultures, composed together and digitally printed.



DESIGN: ALI ZAIDI

**motiroti** has always been at the vanguard of creativity. The company imaginatively engages with a range of artists and audiences to reveal a new understanding of what culture can do. The result is beautiful and accessible – whatever the medium.

Keith Khan, Head of Culture 2012  
(co-founder of **motiroti**)

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Front cover: portraits from a variety of projects.  
Background: *Captives* (1993), gallery installation  
exploring the idea of categorisation, Walsall Museum  
and Art Gallery.  
Back cover: *Mix & Match* (2003).  
Photographs by Ali Zaidi.

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