



Video still, Gauri Narain

## Working class God

Across the nautical miles  
on an island of fishermen  
by the sheltered narrows of the China Sea  
sits a house of God  
built by the father's father's of today's tillers of the waves.  
This temple is listed by the antiquities and monuments office  
as a cultural icon of benefit to tourism  
and scheduled for cleaning, re-tiling and restoration.  
But it's listed as a part of life by these simple, honest folk  
and scheduled for re-dedication and blessing.  
For this is no Medici palace for an elegant, effete and cultured deity  
this is the home of a working-class God with work to be done.  
Controlling the elements, protecting the nets  
and holding all vessels in a warm embrace.  
Government bureaucrats, feathering their caps  
want to preserve for posterity  
the muted patinated tints and quaint dingy dank corners.  
The villagers want a new brush to sweep clean  
and paint in bright, lively, vibrant hues  
of gaudily gold, red and green.  
This house is not for a redundant God of antiquity.  
This God requires daily sustenance, libations and offerings.  
He is part of the clan and everywhere visible  
In the sparkling of infinite pin pricks of light  
as a gentle rain dapples the calm green sea.  
Deep amongst the ancient banyans  
those sentinels with twisted limbs entwined in a sensual embrace,  
gnarled boughs that mirror the stooped backs of ancient mariners  
themselves as hard and weathered as aged teak.  
Now foreigners have come to Kau Sai Chau  
Italians, offering their skills with open hands  
that carry the genetic legacy  
of Leonardo, Michelangelo, Botticelli, Caravaggio.  
They delve with care amidst the treasures  
and peel away the secrets of the years.  
Uncovered scripts and ancient colours  
reveal the hand of venerated generations.  
Those long gone but ever present in nooks and crannies  
in ancestral tablets and in the faces of boys at play.  
The job is done, outsiders gone.  
Life returns to the slow rhythmic pulse of the sea  
and God rests his feet in front of the fire  
at home with a cup of tea.