

When I was asked to curate again for Art Mumbai, I paused.

The last time, I assembled a quiet space: bookcases, reflection, a kind of hope. That hope feels distant now. We are living through something harder to name: a sense of stillness, yes, but one marked by suspension, by dread. The war mongering, the violence, the turning of communities against each other. This isn't a storm that will pass. It is the air we now breathe.

The exhibition I want to put together today, titled *A Short History of Decay*, borrows from E.M. Cioran, whose meditations on despair—written in the ruins of post-war Europe—offer a bleak clarity. He writes: “Hope is the worst of evils, because it prolongs the torments of man.”

Here, decay is not a metaphor or a crisis. It is simply the condition. The slow rot of institutions, of language, of meaning. Not necessarily to be reversed, but to be witnessed. I want to turn to you to ask: what does it mean to create at this moment? Not to intervene or redeem, but to record? To hold the textures of dread you carry, the weight of unprocessed grief, the slippage of meaning?

Alongside decay, I want to explore doubt—perhaps the most radical force we have left. Cioran prized doubt above all else. In a time where certainty has become violent, where ideology turns intelligence into hate, how do we live with doubt? What happens when we begin to question even the values we hold most sacred: love, nation, family, justice? What does it mean to make work that begins from not knowing, and remains there?

This show is not a space for answers, nor for reassurance. It is a space for unease, for questioning what it means to create in a moment where so much has already been lost. I want to ask, gently but seriously: what is the work of art in the age of mechanical devastation? Not just a play on Benjamin's question, but a real and urgent one. What survives when meaning is reproduced to the point of collapse?

If any of this echoes in your work or your process, I would be honoured to include you in this show. This is not a call to comfort, but to confrontation. Not a search for answers, but a space for reckoning.

Anish Gawande
May, 2025