

Recollect, reclaim

SHAILAJA TRIPATHI



What is real and what is not? What is valuable and what is not? Artist Sudarshan Shetty raises several such questions in his ongoing show in the city

When Sudarshan Shetty isn't doing monumental installations, he churns out poetic, poignant and dense art shows. Not that the latter is secondary to his large-scale works, it is just that Sudarshan oscillates between these two extremes. At GallerySKE in Bengaluru, his home state — his parents belong to Mangalore and was born there — Sudarshan has attempted the latter.

“Who must write these lines” — is a pensive show which comprises sculptural installations, photography and drawings. “It is a sort of a continuation of the same ideas of memories, recollections and reclaiming like in my last show in Delhi “Every Broken Moment Piece By Piece”. It's just an approach with multiplicity,” says Sudarshan, who was in town for the opening of the show.

An untitled triptych of images set at the Gateway of India in Mumbai, shows the artist dropping an earthen pot as observed in Hindu last rites. In front of the photographic work in the gallery, is placed a broken earthen pot, which has been reconstructed. “The pot is symbolic of our body. The same body we recall through these products whose ads claim to rejuvenate us, make us fair, make us slimmer, make us attractive. We keep recalling youth and our bodies knowing very well that all this is not really going to work,” explains Shetty.



Sudarshan often resorts to poetry and it’s evident in his titles too. The title of this show resulted from his efforts of translating “Bahut kathin hai dagar panghat ki” for each of the five recycled teak-wood panels. The famous line from Sufi poet Amir Khusro’s poem is written on the back of five hand-carved wood reliefs with the artist trying to translate it: “The path to the river is very difficult”, “the journey to the water is most arduous”, “the road to the well is much too difficult”. “Khusro isn’t talking about just the water. He is talking about something else. I liked how this kind of poetry opens up a huge speculative space open to interpretation. My father was a Yakshagana performer so I grew up watching it and reading regional poetry. Nath panthi poetry introduced me to Kabir and I was stuck by the presence of opposing images in the same dohas”.

Sudarshan is also fond of recycled wood which he has been working with for some time now. He buys them off local street shops which receives wood from broken homes getting a revamp and reconstruction. Using recycled wood, then, fits into his narrative absolutely.

Alongside the reliefs, an assemblage of terracotta objects placed on a long low plinth reminds the viewer of an excavation site. “These objects have been bought from a street market but when you put them in a gallery, their value changes. So how do you understand value?,” says Sudarshan, whose works will be shown at Art Dubai by GallerySKE.

With works like a wooden carpet folded up against the wall as though someone might have tripped over it, a found antique chair, restored with the addition of a hybrid leg, a large boulder appearing to be stone but is not, Sudarshan looks at what is real and fake, what is functional and what is not, what is meaningful and what is not.

(“Who must write these lines” is on at GallerySKE, 2 Berlie Street, Langford Town, till April 30).