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AN INITIATIVE BY

STIR



Bijoy Jain
Immediate Landscapes, 2018



Pic: Shantanu Prakash

ART-ITORIAL

Just the other day I was having a rather animated and intense discussion with two fellow artists on how technology is changing the way the new-gen approaches how they learn and work. The observation of one of my friends, a teacher at a Mumbai based architecture college, is from close quarters. "I was aghast when one of my students replied in a very matter-of-fact way when I asked why they prefer watching a movie than reading a book," she shared. Any guesses? It is sad and simple - "One has to imagine too much while reading a book! Something that is easily provided in a film." This phenomenon is applicable to consuming just about anything, especially in the creative space. The biggest joy of seeing art, for instance, is its discovery and interpretation. And if this very thing about it is the pain-point, then little can be done. As an artist with clay as my medium of choice, I know that there is absolutely no escape to dirtying my hands! I cannot avoid babysitting a kiln over a twelve-hour long firing process, and if it is forty-five degrees in the peak of summer, then so be it.

The process of art production itself varies widely, most requiring tedious and meticulous renditioning. There are however art practices that utilize the ready-made as components for the work they create. Is the objective to simplify the very process of making art? While the use of the machine-made product to make hand-made work of art itself is not new neither uncommon, in this issue we delve into the overlapping spaces of art and product, in context of architectural spaces and design processes. Marcel Duchamp used the readymade, as did the Dada artists in as early as 1910. The idea was a mockery of art by teasing and rejecting logic and reasoning, and to critically question its value in a rapidly industrialized world. "The real point of the readymade was to deny the possibility of defining art," said Calvin Tomkins, the biographer of Duchamp. In the contemporary context, is it the functional associations of the mass-produced objects that are relevant to artists? Or is it the visual form and texture of these impersonally manufactured things? Further, we investigate the vice-versa - use of art in the mass-produced (or at-least mechanically produced, in multiples) functional products.

Johann Goethe called architecture frozen music. Dance, then, can be described as painting in motion. Sculpture, a section of prose.

Crafting (or creating) is the basis of all art. Architectural and design practices are paying more attention to aesthetics along with functionality than ever. Are the lines blurring between creative disciplines? Maybe, the lines never existed and were only a figment of our imagination.

Rahul Kumar

Consulting Editor, Art & Interactive Media
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Pics: Courtesy of Subodh Gupta Studio

WHEN OBJECTS TELL A STORY

*The work of contemporary artist **Subodh Gupta** overlaps multiple disciplines and genres. Some of his most critically acclaimed projects use the readymade products as components of his art work. **Rahul Kumar of mondo*arc india** | STIR interviews him on his interest in using products and associated symbolism in his practice.*

The one name that emerges immediately in the Indian contemporary art context when thinking about 'utilizing the readymade' is that of Subodh Gupta. Born in 1964 in Khagaul, Bihar, Gupta studied at the College of Art, Patna before moving to Delhi. The primary specialization for his art education was painting, but soon he explored a wide variety of disciplines and media, like, performance and interactive art, video and photography, sculptures and installations. Gupta is best known for working with everyday objects. His iconic forms using stainless-steel utensils are one of the most recognizable works. His concerns as an artist are reflective of the universal issues of migration and equality and are a commentary on the socio-political development of our contemporary society.

(Edited excerpts)

You have used the readymade (or products) to make art works and installations in the past. What has been the consideration in the choice of the product; is it the form and other physical attributes or the meanings and associations ascribed to the objects that play a role?

I do use objects, or 'ready-mades', to make works but I would not say that my work fits-in completely with the readymade tradition as such. The first work for which I used such objects was titled '29 Mornings' made in 1996. I used actual wooden *patras* (low height sitting stools made with wooden planks) that I remembered from my childhood home. I made this work even before I knew of the long history of using readymade objects in art. I would

describe my using 'objects' the same way as a painter uses his paints. The objects, stools and utensils are mere material to me. What is important is that the object itself is transformed in the art making process. Of course, the original function of the object becomes a part of the meaning of the work, but it is crucial that it has a new interpretation and often even a new form. In my recent work at the Bihar Museum of Art titled 'Yantra', the objects are part of a mandala and from afar one gets lost in the meditative pattern rather than instantly noticing that the elements making up the mandala are in fact functional household appliances. Here is another secret - many of the elements of 'Yantra' are not even readymade appliances, but rather replicas that were fabricated in my studio to

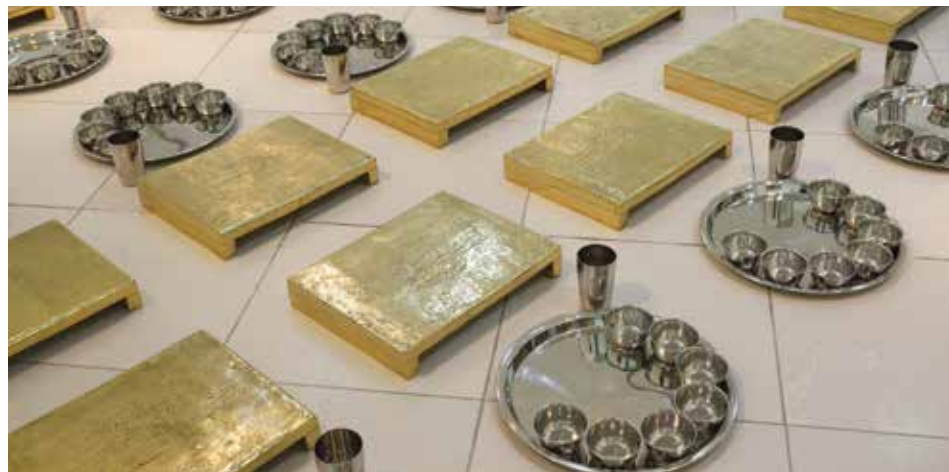


Above and Right School, 45 brass cast stools, stainless steel utensils, 560 x 545 Cms, 2008

Facing Page Top Yantra installation in progress at Bihar Museum of Art

Facing Page Bottom Left Yantra (side view detail)

Facing Page Bottom Right Yantra, Steel structure, appliances, stainless steel utensils, 670 x 670 x 305 Cms, 2017



resemble the original appliance! Similarly, when I make a cast bicycle or stools, it is not the readymade object itself, but a point of reference. That brings in yet another layer of distance and disconnect from the readymade.

In continuation, what is the intended viewer reaction basis the associations they may make of the ready-made objects?

When you use an object that already has a determined function, history and association for the viewer, that set of connections and connotations will add to the meaning of the work. In 'Yantra' for instance, these pre-existing associations play a particularly important role, as the work is trying to set up a contrast between the every-day, industrial objects and the cosmic, meditative form that they have become a part of. However, ultimately when I make an artwork, I

always hope to take the viewer past those prescribed notions about an object. I see art-making as a sort of alchemical practice, so if I have not managed to transform or elevate the objects from its original function in my work, then I have failed.

Given that often these works are large scale, how do you approach the concept of space in contrast to the work? Do you make works, and then develop options to place/display them, or more often is it the vice-versa - create works in reaction to a specific space? How important is the site-specificity and the associated contexts of space in your large-scale sculptures?

This process really varies from project to project and I enjoy the different challenges that arise when making large public sculptures. I have done many projects where I develop the whole idea for the work after seeing the site, but often I have a few pre-existing ideas of works that I am interested



in making and certain concepts become particularly relevant to the site that I am presented with. Referencing 'Yantra' again, I did have a general sketch and visualization of the artwork almost a year before I got down to making it. However, I had no idea where and how realistically the work would fit. When I had the opportunity to make something for the Bihar Museum, I knew almost immediately that it was the perfect place for this work. The work fits very well in the site, not just in terms of scale, but in terms of the relationship that Bihar has with modernism and development on one hand, and Buddhism on the other. The best works arise when the themes that are being tackled in the artwork also fit-in well with the history and politics of the site where the artwork is installed.

Adda / Rendez-vous, a retrospective of Subodh Gupta is on at Monnaie de Paris, France between April 13 and August 26, 2018.

