

Artistic take on things in a state of flux

NIHA MASIH 26th Jun 2011

Constant change is one of the leitmotifs of life and to be able to hold on to anything in this swirl can be quite a task. What is or can be the nature of resistance to the world around us which is evolving, decaying or perhaps momentary? Exploring this complex trope of how to face things in a state of flux, is a new exhibition at Gallery Maskara in Mumbai, titled Hold On.



Works from left to right: Waterline, Himsaila Project, 3 Simple Sculptures and Alliance IV (centre).

The works on display are responses to this idea that are conceptual, material and sensory in nature. So while there are installations, there is also video art, photographs, sculptures as well as performance art. Co-curator Avantika Bawa, who is an artist herself and a Fine Arts professor at Vancouver shares, "I wanted to deal with ideas that I don't work on as an artist. The idea of being on the edge with an imminent foreboding fascinates me and I held on to the idea.

Polish artist Mark Ranis' work stands out tall amidst all other works. Dealing primarily with ecological issues, Ranis has produced a video as well as a massive site-specific installation which is pure genius. The video titled Hold On which gave the exhibition its name, juxtaposes images of the magnificent landscape of Greenland with NASCAR car races to come up with an acerbic take on environmental degradation. The installation called Himsaila Project is a breathtaking rendition of icebergs made of white gauze and ice. It manages to overwhelm the viewer through its amorphous form.

The only Indian artist to feature is Baroda based sculptor Mansoor Ali, who has done sculptures called Beautifully Corrupt and Alliance IV. Humanitarian concerns have always been central to his work and this time too he explores the political corruption prevailing in the country. Speaking of his work, he says, "I wanted to look at how long can people of this country hold on to things that they are not happy with (like shoddy governance)? Many a times there are important external factors binding people." Alliance IV is a set of chairs bound by disks, while Beautifully Corrupt has termites feeding on an ordinary chair.



Mansoor Ali's Beautifully Corrupt

American artist Joshua Smith's installations are minimalist, in tune with the modernist approach to architecture that it looks at. It seems like a visual pause as it tries to hold on to the culture of the handmade. The last participant, Satellite Bureau's collaboration titled Waterline resulted in a mammoth installation of a vessel with a map marking international trading routes. It attempts to locate the dockyards of the city in the precincts of the gallery using the shipping industry as a metaphor.

The exhibition opened with Stuart Keeler's performance art where he tried to delve into the now disappearing green spaces in the megalopolis. As a commemorative gesture, he asked passer-bys to dab him with green paint to rekindle the memory of such spaces. Locating all the works in context, co-curator and art historian Celina Jeffery says, "The majority of the works were made for the show and three works are site-specific which use Mumbai's bustling, nervous and frenetic energy as a vantage point. Rather than having a didactic disposition though, the resultant works retain the proposition and more importantly the essence of a condition."



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