

Shifting gear

Shakuntala Kulkarni dons body armour that entraps even as it protects, says **Zeenat Nagree**.

They appear like relics from a war of the past. The elaborate cane armour that takes over Chemould Prescott Road this fortnight, however, hasn't witnessed bloodshed. But it doesn't mean this protective gear did not endure acts of brutality. The armour stands as a metaphor for the acts of daily violence that women are subjected to on city roads, be it in the form of eve teasing or molestation.

Even such armour sculptures are the core of Shakuntala Kulkarni's solo show *Of bodies, armour and cages* that opens this fortnight. "What does violence mean? Violence is not always physical violence," said Kulkarni. "It is on various levels. Whistling that makes you uncomfortable is a kind of violence. Even language can act as violence."

Kulkarni wore the foldable pieces, which she has designed herself, at various places in the city. The artist chose spots that are "undergoing transformation or are under threat", she said. The locations included her old family home in Gamdevi, a chawl in Shivaji Park, the steps of the Town Hall and Juhu beach.

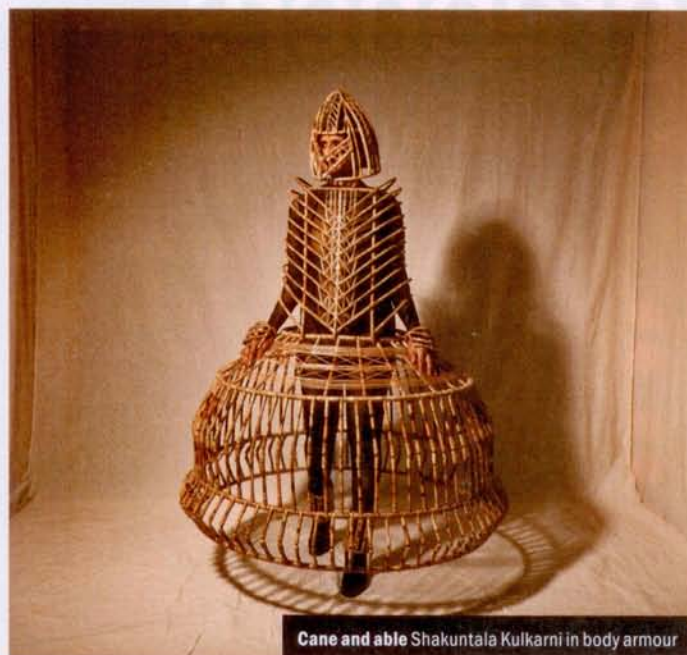
The artist documented herself standing mutely at these areas

through photographs and video, which will be on view at the exhibition. Additionally, the artist also posed in the armour in her studio, against a white backdrop. Twenty-four such pictures are part of the show, displayed in postcard-sized format.

The two different settings are meant to bring out Kulkarni's differing experience of wearing the body armour. These depended upon the location she was at and the people who were watching her. Even though the armour restricted her movements, Kulkarni said she felt protected when she was in a public space. In a private setting, however, when security was not a concern, Kulkarni experienced entrapment. "When you wear it for protection – if that's the intention – it's very uncomfortable. You can't even move comfortably," Kulkarni said. "But, for a moment you feel protected in the cage."

The artist is aware that armour made of cane hardly appears protective. The graceful curves of the designs "look relatively feminine, linear [and] fragile...", Kulkarni acknowledges in a press release. Perhaps, their structure draws attention to the fact that unless the attitudes of those inflicting violence change, no armour can protect the victims.

Of bodies, armour and cages opens at Chemould Prescott Road on **Sat Aug 18**.



Review

Another Documentation



Avantika Bawa, Gallery Maskara

If it weren't for the fresh bright orange paint on the 25-foot metal scaffold sculpture at Gallery Maskara, we would've assumed the gallery was getting ready to put up yet another enormous installation that we've come to expect from their artists. But the conspicuous paint made us conscious of the presence of an artist's hand. Avantika Bawa's solo exhibition features this quotidian object as one of the artworks that attempts to "present the gallery as a construction site".

Titled *Another Documentation*, the show comprises objects that appear to be borrowed from the mutating places of Bawa's inspiration. But, not quite. Drawings that resemble architectural blue prints appear in photographs. Placed on workhorse-like easels in the midst of real construction sites in Delhi, Faridabad and Mumbai, the drawings may appear genuine but they serve no real function. The idea extends to the workhorse-easels, also on display at the gallery. Even the long metal tray, which lies on the ground and is filled with black sand, appears as if it could be taken from a

construction project but won't serve a purpose if placed in the setting.

Bawa has an abiding interest in construction sites. Her paintings in the 1990s, when she studied at the MS University of Baroda, were inspired from hours of sketching rising columns and heaps of cement. Architecture was at the centre of Bawa's previous solo *Mathesis: dub, dub, dub* at Gallery Maskara in 2009. The show's centrepiece consisted of grey cartons piled on top of each other that resembled a cityscape and also referenced the gallery's previous use as a warehouse.

However, unlike Bawa's previous show, *Another Documentation* doesn't appear entirely site-specific. Construction scaffolds bring to mind bamboo frames (an idea explored in Priyanka Choudhary's 2010 installation, *Pubic*, at the same gallery), whose haphazard character stands apart from the neat coldness of a neon metal frame. The result: Bawa's fictional construction site doesn't completely capture the frenzied present. It appears to imagine an ordered future instead. **Zeenat Nagree**