

MCAD: President's Lecture Series

Jay Coogan
(Speech Excerpt)

It's my pleasure to introduce Manav Gupta, an artist from India, who has pioneered collaborative art practises through mega murals that he's done, through poetry, collaborative performance, and large-scale installations.

I just want to touch on some of the range of work that he does, some of which you'll be seeing this afternoon and hearing about this afternoon, but just to give you an idea of the scope of his work. He's done public service announcements about climate change, sustainable development, ecosystems, and alternative energy for India's Ministry of Environment and Forests. He has won an international acclaim for his 6-foot-high, 10,000-square-foot mural, *The Tree of Life*, commissioned in 2010 for the headquarters of the leading telecom company, I probably won't get the name right, Bharti Airtel, close enough, located near Delhi.

Its significance of this project lies in the process that he used to create the work, which simultaneously used conceptual practises, site-specific practises, collaborative practises, and a kind of performative element to it. He has co-authored a book of poems and paintings with the former president of India, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, published by Penguin India, and Manav has been listed by the Financial Times among the top 10 contemporary Indian artists. His works have been sold by the auction houses of Christie's, Bonham's, Philip de Pure, and are in leading public collections around the world, including the Parliament of India, the Rashtrapati Bhawan, and the Royal Family of Oman. Trained in Kolkata at the Academy of Fine Arts, Manav currently works in New Delhi.

More than all his accolades and accomplishments, I want to point out the deep spiritual and life-affirming place his work emanates from. He is interested in the sacred, but not from a religious point of view. Rather, he thinks about the flow of water, the meaning of light, and the sacredness of people and how they merge together. Manav comes from the sacred Ganges River to the sacred Mississippi River to explore what this river is in our culture, with the hope of making a large- scale installation project in Minnesota, which links our country's most iconic river with his country's.