

Songs of Clay

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As artist Manav Gupta prepares for the London leg of his third travelling trilogy, Rainforests and the Circle of Life, we take a look at the premiere of his works at the National Museum in South Africa earlier this year.

Nature moves him. So much that he sways to tunes and attempts to capture and recreate all that he clicks with the eyes of his mind. For Manav Gupta his art is a contemplation of the spiritual and the natural communion. Medium does not restrict him. So he plays with a wide range — from the conceptual to multimedia, installations to ambient spaces, the canvas to sculptures — as he puts them to fresh creative tasks.

Technically he is sound. And therefore when the High Commission of India, Pretoria, launched 'Unsung Hymns Of Clay', the third edition of his travelling trilogy — 'Rainforests And The Circle Of Life' — in South Africa earlier this year, he added many more accolades to his kitty and very effortlessly at that.

His installations and conceptual works on display brought to fore the physical interface of global warming — man's interference with earth's natural ecosystems and disregard for environmental consciousness. It is not as if the idea struck Gupta all of a sudden. Much before climate change became drawing room conversation and awareness gathered momentum, Gupta had been inculcating his concern and respect for the environment in his works since the very beginning. In his own words, he draws his spiritual strength from nature.

"When I paint, what transcends on the canvas are the hope and the power of the eternal truths of nature's emblematic symbols," he says, adding, "Light for me is hope and colour and the Universe in which it exists." This is when, for him, the world loses its meaning and the larger one takes over. "...And I paint," he states.

His installations present the complexities of the relationship between nature and man's use of it. His works create a sense of calm, connectedness and quiet contemplation, rather than invoking agitation. Perhaps for this reason the impact is unexpectedly strong.

In his installation, the shrinking river in clay, he has used the earthen lamp or diya as a metaphor to explore the issues of environmental consciousness.

"We recognise and respect earth only when we use its resources without reverence. Having been a part of religious rituals for many years and having grown up and lived this practice in India for years, I have been affected by this whole symbolic circle of life. The diyas in my installation explore and raise questions on environmental consciousness," he shares.

The artist has also taken his analogy from the sacred river Ganga and drawn inspiration from the opening lines of the lyrics of an old song from an Indian movie that speaks about the dichotomy of perception: "If you believe, then I am sacred, or else mere water that flows..." He has tried to address

the issue of pollution of the rivers, the shrinking of water and its availability and other climate change issues.

With a minimalistic approach, the artist depicts his philosophy in understanding tones that touch deeply and reverberate, lingering in the mind long after the visual engagement ends. And it stays there.

Bibliography — manavgupta.in