

June 20, 2013

Environmental art – Unsung hymns of clay

By Sulger Buel Lovell

International environmental artist, Manav Gupta speaks out about climate change and sustainable development at Lovell Gallery and National Arts Festival.

He speaks in poetry and visual metaphor through installations and through paintings layered in watercolour, acrylic and oils, communicating in light and colour and lyrical form, all that he perceives in nature and how it relates to his soul.

As audience, when ‘green issues’ are mentioned, we are coming to expect to be lectured or made to feel guilty. Manav’s approach is the opposite. He presents nature to us, its beauty and vulnerability. His “unsung hymns of clay” installation presents the complexity of the relationship between nature and man’s use of it. His work creates a sense of calm, connectedness, and quiet contemplation, rather than invoking agitation. Perhaps for this reason the impact is unexpectedly strong.

Proclaimed “fresh, minimalistic, innovative and original” by Architecture and Design (June 2013), in this latest installation the artist inverts thousands of Indian earthen lamps to transfigure them into a river of clay.

As Cultural Commentator, Pavan K Varma explains: “the earthen lamp is a part of every home in India. It is a utilitarian vessel at one level, but a powerful vehicle of reverence at another Manav has elevated this humble piece of clay to an artistic pedestal with remarkable finesse. Its simplicity is breathtaking, but its meaning is multi-dimensional. For him it is the bridge between the individual and the divine. It is prayer incarnate, yearning personified. It represents the soil, mother earth, the pact with nature. Its very fragility is a pointer to both the environmental crisis we are facing and the need to do something about it.”

Coined the ‘master of light’, Manav Gupta is one of India’s leading contemporary artists and is listed by Financial Times among ten contemporary Indian artists whose works would fetch good returns. His works have been auctioned and sold at Christie’s, Bonham’s, Philip de Pury, and are represented in private and museum collections worldwide. Best known for his mega murals and as a pioneer of collaborative art practices, his record six floor high ‘Tree of Life’ fetched Museum site status for Airtel Campus, by the Limca Book of Records 2012 and 2013.

‘Unsung hymns of clay’ forms part of the third edition of Manav Gupta’s global exhibition: Traveling Trilogy III – Rainforests and the circle of life, which has toured the US, Europe and South East Asia prior to coming to South Africa. After premiering in Pretoria, the exhibition makes its Cape Town debut at a special preview on Saturday 22nd June, a selection of miniatures then travel to the National Arts Festival, and return for the exhibition’s month long run from July 9th to August 10th at The Lovell Gallery in Woodstock.