

Is it mere water or holy river Ganga?

By Hemani Bhandari

Ganga Water Project Along The Time Machine by Manav Gupta (India Habitat Centre)

"Sacred, If you believe I lie wrapped in a heap of nothingness Unsung, Unlit, Unheard Till the end of time."

That's Manav Gupta at his musing best. Forever challenging his comfort zone even in the physical world, Gupta has created another work of art to marvel at. Thousands of earthen lamps are placed inverted along several rows and chillums hang from the wall down the columns to create an illusion of the Ganga waterfront. When dusk falls and the area is lit up, one can almost hear the sound of the waves.

Titled "Rain, the Ganga Waterfront Along The Time Machine" from the series "Excavation in Hymns of Clay", the installation represents a waterfall wherein Gupta has used the Ganga, the revered river in India, as the idiom and earthen lamps and chillums as metaphors to draw home the point: "If you consider me sacred, I am pure, else mere water, it flows." Gupta says it's the maverick inside him that inspired the project. The installation is on view at the Plaza steps at the India Habitat Centre where people can engage with it, understand it and absorb its calm.

The most striking thing about the installation is the optical illusion that Gupta has succeeded in creating with the earthen lamps and hanging chillums. The architectural engagement of the pottery with the walls where it is placed transforms the regular venue into a riparian landscape.

"The architectural engagement of art with space and construction is something which is a matter of concern for me and is very important for art to belong there," says Gupta.

According to the artist, the earthen lamp and chillums have a negligible existence and are discarded once used, and so is the case with the Ganga and other natural resources that mankind uses and discards with alarming nonchalance.

"It's a poor potter's produce which is quintessentially Indian and in terms of micro-finance situation, I am trying to rehabilitate them as I buy diyas in huge numbers. It's deeply satisfying." — Manav Gupta