

Taking art beyond boundaries — Maverick Genius

Termed a 'maverick genius' by critics, artist Manav Gupta uses art as a medium to spread the message of water conservation and sustainable living. Freedom, a reflective term, is synonymous with artistic liberation and celebration of the soul. This holds true for Manav Gupta. The artist, a true patriot, began his art journey on India's Independence Day almost two decades back. His path has been laden with all the essence the country carries as he embraces the principles of ancient Indian philosophy, way of life and scriptures through art.

His paintings and sculptures depicting the terrain and totems of the Bastar forests, his celebrated series on shoonya (zero) drawing inspiration from the ancient Indian philosophy of the universe, the sun and the moon, the typical jugalbandi between musicians, his installation called Time Machine made with kulhads (earthen cups) at Gurgaon and his public art installation, Rain, the Ganga Waterfront, hosted by India Habitat Centre (IHC) in New Delhi, are all testimony to creative art. Going beyond Manav's installation, Rain, the Ganga Waterfront, was awe-inspiring as it used thousands of earthen lamps and chillums (clay pipes) to create an illusion of a waterfall.

It was an exemplary artwork as Manav attached his craft with sustainable development and called for attention to the use of global resources. His first-of-its-kind Indo-US public art project on sustainable living received critical acclaim. The 70'x65'x60' installation, Rain, the Ganga Waterfront Along Time Machine at the IHC was celebrated by one and all. Moreover, the involvement of people from different walks of life in the project provided it a wider reach and visibility.

Manav is most sought-after for depth of colour light and composition in his paintings and for innovations in art practices. Last year, he was invited to deliver the President's lecture at the Minneapolis College of Art & Design and for the forecast talk on public art by two leading international organisations in the US for disseminating the Indo-American edition of the Travelling International Public Art Project on Sustainable Development.

The artist has been credited for re-utilising everyday objects of clay for large-scale public art in an attempt to transform local items and produce them on a global platform, a move that primarily stems from environmental consciousness. Manav is a true ambassador of India's soft power, having been invited to the US, Europe, South Africa and the Middle East with solo exhibitions called Travelling Trilogy at Massachusetts, New York, Iowa, San Francisco, Berlin, London, Muscat, Pretoria, Johannesburg and Cape Town, besides major Indian cities in recent years.

His series of art installations, Excavations in Hymns of Clay, and painting series, A Hundred and Eight, are quintessentially Indian as he continues to take up sustainable development and deploy the humble Indian potter's produce to form avant-garde cutting-edge installations. Using sustainable material for development and respecting water as a precious resource, reducing wastage and working on river banks are the obvious means for conservation.

Kaleidoscope

Manav's works have transcended the constraints of any particular medium and permeated museums, galleries and corporate institutions. His paintings include two signature series, Large Canvases: Umbilical Cords of Earth and Contemporary Miniatures: Water Colours on Paper and his experiment with films was manifested into a one-minute public service message which was commissioned by the Government of India.

Think Tank

Manav was a part of panel discussions during his installation, Rain, the Ganga Waterfront along Time Machine, as government and commerce industry leaders, environment and water experts, art veterans, and spiritual leaders discussed on water, earth's resources and sustainability, and how art and spirituality connects people to contemplate and respond. Further, his concept of Mark Twain's Mississippi Poetry Festival at Waterfront is another example of fine art.

One of India's most erudite and versatile contemporary artists, Gupta has reinvented the language of clay by infusing true originality of thought and treatment in the humble produce of the potter's wheel. His 'River Waterfront' installation connected rivers of the world — from the Ganga in India to the Mississippi in the USA.

The Ministry of External Affairs described him on Twitter as an 'Ambassador of India's Soft Power'. Gupta has been the first artist-in-residence at Rashtrapati Bhawan, invited personally by former President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam. He has also been the only artist commissioned by the Ministry of Environment and Forests to create one-minute films on climate change for national television broadcast.

His works have been auctioned by Christie's and Bonhams and are a part of collections in various international museums. He has four entries in the Limca Book of Records, is listed by the Financial Times as one of the ten contemporary Indian artists whose works would fetch good returns, and has been featured in the Bible of art, Blouin Artinfo.

Manav is a true artist as his creations are an extension of his efforts to sensitise people towards nature.