

Breaking the Mould — Artist Manav Gupta articulates how objects of clay can be adapted to address environmental urgencies

By Khorshed Deboo

Manav Gupta has always been interested in understanding how perception and context interplay with each other. This understanding lies at the heart of his practice of using clay pottery — earthen lamps, chillums and kulhads — as the primary medium for his public art installations on environmental consciousness.

His 'River Waterfront' installation, which first appeared at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi in 2015 where it drew over a hundred thousand visitors, later travelled to Minneapolis and New York as part of his Global Public Art Project connecting rivers of the world. The plaza steps of the India Habitat Centre in the capital witnessed an overwhelming bustle of people, a footfall of almost a hundred thousand visitors witnessing Gupta's Ganga Waterfront.

Gupta deploys quintessentially Indian potter's produce to transform their individual identity into metaphors and idioms of sustainability. The architectural engagement of his pottery with the walls where it is placed transformed the venue into a riparian landscape, creating the optical illusion of an actual river flowing. Critics and the public alike remarked that one could almost hear the sound of waves due to the calmness and serenity the work added to the Plaza Steps.

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

The lecture at the Museum Society of Bombay and Prince of Wales Museum (CSMVS), at their auditorium, Fort, on June 30, 2016, titled 'Excavations in Hymns of Clay', presented the artist's full body of work to a prestigious Mumbai audience.