

The little clay pot — Artist Manav Gupta uses the most basic terracotta items in our everyday inventory and mounts an installation at a mall to convey his message of ecological sustainability

By Priyanka Joshi

Art helps us perceive life in a different way, either through colour, form or its latent narrative. So believes artist Manav Gupta, who has redefined public art spaces in India, and has mounted his series of terracotta installations, Hymns of Clay, at DLF Mall of India, Noida.

"I want to take out art from museum and gallery spaces and make it available for everybody. Let them bring in their own understanding and interpretations. This place gets a footfall of 70,000 people every day, which may not be the case with a museum. A travelling museum at a mall works as an interlude and offers an experiential." — Manav Gupta

Gupta's clay exhibits are intended to raise awareness about our ecologically fragile times and the need for sustainability.

"The exhibition is about water and the five elements of nature. I have used the most basic and functional items created by a potter since the beginning of time — earthen lamps (diyas), local cigars (chillum) and earthen cups (kulhar). At one level, these items are very personal and intimate. At another level, these vessels are used for very humble experiences. You buy them from the roadside and throw them after use. They represent how casually we treat the earth's resources. That is the metaphor I have used to drive home the point about sustainability."

Flow of river (The waterfront):

"Ganga is close to my heart," Gupta adds. In this exhibit, he uses chillum and diyas to depict the ebb and tide of life. He uses lamps because they are woven in the cultural-religious fabric of India from time immemorial, while the chillum depicts cheap intoxication and sensory gratification. And life is perennially a conflict of both our higher and lower selves.

History recall (The Time Machine):

In this installation, Gupta uses terracotta cups to form an hourglass.

"Time Machine recalls the mechanised lives we lead without respecting sustainable living and resources. I use cups here as a symbolic measure of limited time." The fragility of clay juxtaposed with the finite nature of the cup draws attention to our wasted perception of rapidly capitalistic, consumerist human interaction with earth.

Love (Riverside bed):

This one is about stringing life till the end. It's a symbol of the history of love through the use of the male and female idioms of existence.

"My purpose of choosing this element is that without love we don't exist," says Gupta.

Global story (The Noah's Ark):

This is an artist's imagination of an ancient civilization, Noah retrieving each of earth's creations and ensuring their survival till posterity. This is Gupta's way of saying how we should save ourselves from the wrath of nature and not tamper with it.

Life Saviors (The beehive garden):

"Bees are a very important chain of our eco system; if they die, then the entire eco system collapses. This beehive garden represents India's younger demographic. I have used chillums here to signify drug abuse which is eating into our future human resource," adds Gupta.