

A Pavlovian world

Narendra Yadav, an artist driven by hard intellect, uses steel in a strikingly original way in his new works

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Like most white metal, there's a clinical, industrial and cold quality about steel. In our country, steel also acquires a banality. Being the most utilitarian metal, steel is stripped of esotericism, reminding us of the daily business of living—of eating, washing, cutting and peeling, and of the clanging sound that perpetually emanates from Indian kitchens. Subodh Gupta subverted this very ordinariness and Indianness of steel and transformed it into a vocabulary for high art.

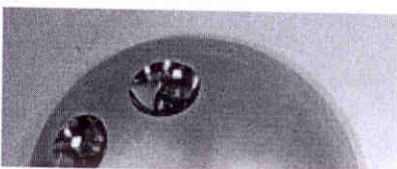


Celestial Bodies in Conversation

A new show on display at Mumbai's Warehouse at 3rd Pasta uses the metal in an entirely original way. Pavlov's God is 45-year-old Narendra Yadav's second solo show (ever since then the prices of Yadav's works have ranged from Rs10 lakh to Rs25 lakh). The Mumbai-based artist, a group creative head at advertising agency Lowe Lintas, made a mark with his debut solo at Mumbai's Museum Gallery in 2006. Like his first, this is a show that rests on an intellectual premise: this time, it's the role of conditioning in human beings and their faiths. Hence, Pavlov; except here instead of Pavlov's dog, it's god, referring to larger forces that

condition our beliefs and actions.

A religious text literally holds up a mirror to a globe; children's comic books acquires sacrosanct connotations when placed on wooden pedestals; plastic foetuses rotate within a stainless steel orb resembling the solar system; hands pierced by syringes and needles balances a pair of worn, tattered underwear. These disparate objects don't filter Yadav's message in the most obvious way. The foetuses—a startling work because of the delicate way in which Yadav has recreated thousands of thin veins and nerves under a translucent skin made of fibreglass, thereby making it uncannily real—symbolizes the human realm that precedes conditioning. The hands balancing the underwear suggests the way we are conditioned to treat waste in our urban existence. The mirrored religious text propped over a globe is a direct reference to religious faith. And the children's books treated as sacred texts gently urges us to break out of our conditioning.



The biggest work in the show is Celestial Bodies in Conversation, a 25x38x5-ft installation of partly covered bodies placed on what resembles a city pavement. Radio sets transmitting cosmic

noise are placed haphazardly next to these bodies. The bodies could be dead or just asleep—the lines between conscious and unconscious are blurred.

The striking quality of Yadav's artistry is a refusal to stick to forms that make up a series. Most installation artists are comfortable with and identified by particular forms—eg., Chintan Upadhyay's babies. Each of these nine works stand out with their singularity of shape. The only common thing in these works is the material, which is steel (except one where he uses wood). The frosty whiteness of steel perfectly complements Yadav's works driven by hard intellect.

Yadav depends a lot on technical precision for the exact effect he wants each work to have on the viewer. Measurements, shadows, lighting and angles are meticulously in order. If you are a collector of works that reflect the artist's emotions and intuition rather than his ideas and technique, these works are not yours to own.

But in the still nascent world of Indian installation art, Yadav is an artist likely to contribute a great deal in the years to come.

Pavlov's God at the Warehouse at 3rd Pasta, Colaba. Till 22 April.