

Other previews

Monali Meher



Untitled works by Monali Meher

Warehouse at 3rd Pasta and Project 88, Colaba

Monali Meher was last seen in India in April, peeling potatoes at the Jehangir Nicholson Gallery at the NCPA. Last year at Live '08, the performance art festival organised by KHOJ in New Delhi, Meher's elaborate performance included passing a ball of red wool around the audience and sticking strips of silver foil on her face. Like many performance art pieces, it left much of her audience perplexed. Meher is not particularly perturbed.

"Performance is not only about making [something] understandable," she said in an email interview from Amsterdam. Instead, the artist should be motivated to create the performance because of a need, even if it is not immediately comprehensible to an audience. "Creating something easily comprehensible because there is only one chance to see a performance is a strange idea,"

she said. "A performance cannot be repeated. If it is, it will be different in that particular time and space." To Meher, the point is that an audience sees the performance unfold before them and reacts spontaneously to it. The pressure is on the artist to draw in the viewer and communicate the rationale for the performance. "Most of the time the audience has [the] choice to be or leave, participate or react," she said. "Vulnerability is strongly connected to the performance."

It is immediacy that makes performance interesting to Meher, who studied painting at the Sir JJ School of Art in 1990. She chanced upon performance art in 1998 when she went to Vienna for a residency. "It was a new language of using body as a medium in front of the public," she said. Her first performance, titled *Reflect, A personal window display*, was held at Jehangir Art Gallery in 1998. Even though it wasn't well-received in Mumbai, the piece won her a two-year residency at



Rijksakademie van Beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam. It was a dream opportunity for Meher who got the chance to learn from legendary performance artists like Marina Abramovic. In recent times, Meher has performed in prestigious places like the Tate Modern in London where she roamed around the hanging artworks clad in a half sari with her bare torso coated in gold leaf for *Between the Familiar/Unfamiliar, the Home and Heart, Beats a Golden Kiss* in 2006.

This fortnight, Meher will be performing at Warehouse at 3rd Pasta while her artworks, which include wall hangings and paintings, will be on display at Project 88. Meher didn't want to divulge much about her performance. "Let's keep it LIVE for that particular day and time, for a one-time experience," she wrote. Here's what we were able to ferret out. Meher's performance was inspired by 26/11 and the theme of the performance is peace even though there's a lot of red paint that gets used. By the end, Meher will have created an enormous and very red wall hanging, which will be displayed in the gallery. *Deepanjana Pal*