



# INDIA TODAY

## LEISURE



## EXHIBITION

# Feat of Clay

*The first Indian Ceramics Triennale aims to establish a place for ceramics in Indian modernism*



reaking Ground', the first 'Indian Ceramics Triennale', opens at the Jawahar Kala Kendra in Jaipur on August 31, promising to establish the rightful place of ceramics in the history of Indian modernism.

Curated by artists Anjani Khanna, Madhvi Subrahmanian, Neha Kudchadkar, Sharbani Das Gupta, Reyaz Badaruddin and Vineet Kacker, the exhibition features 47 artists from 13 countries, all of whom work with clay.

As Khanna points out, "There has been a lack of recognition, particularly amongst the visual arts community in India, of clay as a viable medium of art expression; and only a handful of galleries like (Cymroza Art Gallery, Chemould Gallery, Art and Soul and occasionally Pundole in Mumbai, and Art Heritage and Gallery Nvya in Delhi) support the work of ceramic artists over the decades."

Those looking for a pedagogic historical narrative that traces transcontinental

artistic connections or teacher-student trajectories will need to do their homework. Sharbani Das Gupta tells us that the "work on view is geared towards an emphatically modern expression" even as it extends the potential of the medium through large-scale architectural work, and also in conjunction with performance and sound technologies. Madhvi Subrahmanian underlines the variety of practices that will be showcased, with "alternative, experimental, experiential and site-specific ceramics, beyond the traditional confines of the pedestal and the art gallery".

The work of master ceramists will also be highlighted through various programmes. Veteran ceramist and teacher Ray Meeker will release his book *Building with Fire* during the Triennale, for instance. Das Gupta reveals that "an accompanying collateral exhibition will highlight the trajectory and legacy of Kripal Singh Shekhawat, who is both a traditional craftsman

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and an early modernist painter and whose historiography fills a gap in the debates of artistic development around Swadeshi nationalism, and the polemics of traditionalism versus modernism in India”.

With master classes, workshops, film screenings and a symposium planned for the duration of the exhibition until November 18, the organisers hope to engage a variety of viewers—from academics to those who literally want to get their hands dirty. As Khanna says, “Clay is a magical material that people instinctively engage with.” One hopes that the Triennale will put material, making and process back at the centre of art-making, so as to draw together greater numbers of people who engage with art. ■

—Latika Gupta

MANDAR DEODHAR

## INTERVIEW

# Art of Reusing

Mumbai-based artist **MANISH NAI**, known for his photographs of faded billboards, says he likes to compress the city in his work, literally. Interested in the nature of time and space, he compresses ordinary objects to make pillars, boxes and just about anything. His latest solo show, which opened recently at Het Noordbrabants Museum in the Netherlands, is a commentary on the temporariness of Mumbai.

### Q. Why do you work with waste?

For me, it's new material though it is discarded from daily life. During the last few years I have been working extensively with old clothes, newspapers, cardboard boxes, etc. My idea is to 'reuse' and completely transform the core form into something else.

### Q. How did you start compressing waste material to make art?

I am a trained painter. While using jute as a surface for my painting almost 15 years ago, which is when I began my career as an artist, I realised that I could pull out the threads and create patterns as jute is made of vertical and horizontal threads. I started storing discarded threads in boxes. When I opened the box, I observed that the threads had taken the shape of the box. That's when I realised the sculptural possibility of my work. For me, it is a very intense and natural shift from one

dimension to another. Making sculptures with clothes is a very physical and labour-oriented work, and my work is more about reusing and reprocessing.

### Q. The Prudential Eye Awards (held in Singapore) named you as one of the best-emerging artists in its painting category, yet you've said you started photographing faded billboards precisely because you couldn't paint.

I had decided to send the billboard photos, which I view as 'found paintings'. These are pure photos, but people thought I had done some digital work. I started photographing billboards during the recession when the advertising agencies were affected, the billboards were empty and rain and sun left their marks on them. For me, it is a kind of visual that doesn't give complete information and the text and numbers are unclear, like the economic conditions. ■

—with Chinki Sinha

*“During the recession, billboards were empty, rain and sun left their marks on them. Text was unclear like the economic conditions”*

