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NEW DELHI | SUNDAY, 7 OCTOBER 2018 | millenniumpost

BEACON mp 19

Vipul Kumar



IMAGES: INDIAN CERAMIC TRIENNALE, JKK, JAIPUR



Vineet Kacker

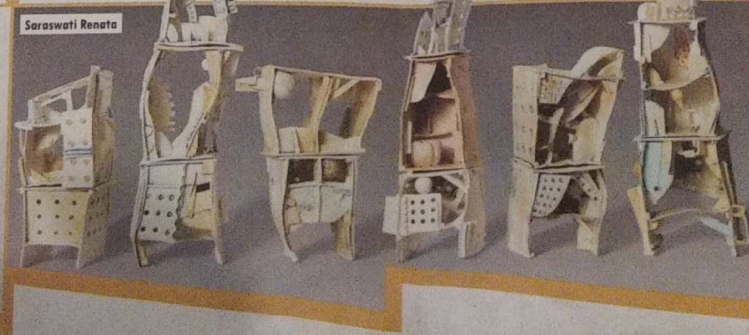
## CERAMIC Corollaries

*The Ceramic Triennale is a celebration of nuanced artistry, of precision in adopting a range of processes, creating with finesse and building a thoughtful narrative with the use of diverse material*

Shampa Shah

Saraswati Renata

Madhavi Subramaniam



## Weekend Break

“Glory is fleeting, but  
obscurity is forever  
- Napoleon Bonaparte

# Madhvi Subrahmaniam's shadows

*As curator, writer, thinker, and philosopher with an environmental aura, Madhvi's works hinged on the makeshift gallery walls like organic elements of a larger relic, hoary and haunting images that meld and slowly pool in our irises*

UMA NAIR

At Breaking Ground in Jaipur, Madhvi Subrahmaniam's three walls created out of stoneware, projections of light and shadow materials became an interactive soliloquy for art lovers to follow and feel the essence of shades and shadows in the art of an installation that can be at once immersive as well as cast a spell on the viewer for a momentous unravelling.

As curator, writer, thinker, and philosopher with an environmental aura, Madhvi's works hinged on the makeshift gallery walls like organic elements of a larger relic, hoary and haunting images that meld and slowly pool in our irises. By no means is this a fanciful analogy. It is the understanding of installation identities and intricacies that made Forest Dreams stand on its own. As an artist, Madhvi transgresses expected gallery reflexes by presenting her images as a summation of evanescent evocations born of a forest: she also prepares us for another strategy, which lies at the heart of this show and that is reverence for nature.

Full of an adroit intensity of experiential wisdom the ceramicist Madhvi breaks away from traditional notions of ceramics. Her explorations into sculptonic identities from referencing a vessel to creating and altering a space into a retinue of memories becomes her leitmotif. Migration and movement become repetitive expressions in her work. The two adjacent walls flanking the central wall are at once a prism of organic, earthy and eco-friendly echoes.

The architectural square grids form a fine balance between contrasting conversations of fragility and strength. The idea of keeping the numbers low and distant from each other make for an imagery



that unveils the additive impact of what is emergent. She also seeks a summary of ceramic sculptures creating an ambient that can be relaxed as well as taut.

Forest Dreams with multiple miniatures on the third wall became a contemplation that questioned the dual nature of an environmental existence. Mad-

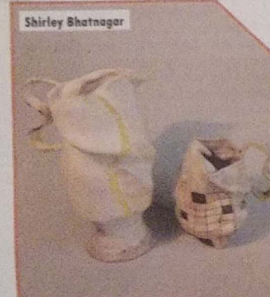
hvi uses contextuality to hold the abstract nature of her visual imagery in counterpoint. This is not an extraneous factor, but an integral part of her self-

“Madhvi is a comrade and co-conspirator of clay; time and gravity are her adversaries. She challenges gravity; she builds high, higher, not out of hubris, but because she knows that “if you push clay against its will, it pushes right back,” said critic and curator Nancy Adjanja

expression. What succeeds is the manner in which she integrates visibility and repetition in a dynamic manner, almost like a chant that of patterns within her ceramic canons.

It is significant that the patterns formed by the proliferating miniatures were arranged like a crowd of mushrooms, the accents of an environmental critique an ideology born of a love for nature. It is the universality of ideation that becomes the signature of intent, the wall could be interpreted as markers ruptured by years and even centuries of growth and progression. Madhvi pushes open a closed door from her past and her experience slips out like a memoir. Perhaps it is apt to recall to mind the words of critic and curator Nancy Adjanja: “Madhvi is a comrade and co-conspirator of clay; time and gravity are her adversaries. She records the shadows of arrow-shaped roads; time wipes them out. She challenges gravity; she builds high, higher, not out of hubris, but because she knows that “if you push clay against its will, it pushes right back”.

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AUTHOR

**O**n the way to Jaipur, to see the historic *Breaking Ground* exhibition collaborated upon by six curators, my mind flashes back to 1996, when Pooja Sood curated Ray Meeker's solo at the Eicher Gallery in Delhi. Sood was mapping her own chart in the world of contemporary art and Ray Meeker was one among her many expositions. My love and passion for ceramics I owe to Pooja Sood and porcelain/raku mistress Leena Batra. I started collecting ceramics after seeing Eicher exhibitions as well as those at Triveni.

Before Ray's work is the monumental *Nature's Signature* by stoneware genius Vipul Kumar who has quietly etched his name as a ceramic artist after working on stone. It is the placement of this work at the cafe that creates a stir both as a catalyst and a signature on caprice with the sunlight falling and creating graphic moments – the credit must go to the design genius Peter Nagy.

Step out and in the courtyard is Ray Meeker's work. Ray is the Zeus of the world of ceramics in India. As a guru, he is non pareil. Ray has graphed the history of ceramics with Indian clay in our country. And Ray's large tower like structure, *Rio Stela: America First!* – a critique of the United States' stance at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992, is the pride of this us that the strength of an artist lies in "allowing yourself to see."

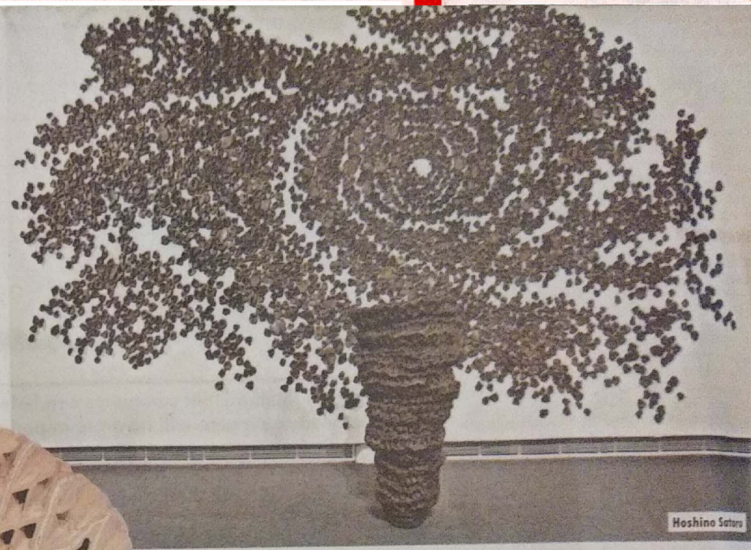
The next work that is a cynosure for all eyes is LN Tallur's *Man with Holes*, made of terracotta and cement – it marries abstract formalism with design and keeps us thinking about the adage of Leonardo da Vinci when he said: Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.

In the inner room is Vineet Kacker's *Himalayan Landscape* with undulations and little punctuated chorten vessels and spirit markers that give us a silent synthesis of philosophy and meditative moorings. On the right of Vineet's work is a soul stirring installation of *Forest Shadows* by the brilliant aesthete Madhavi Subramaniam who melds

or abstraction to create an evocative but incandescent installation that maps memories and gives us a prismatic index of the power of ceramics in the haunts of hybrid art traditions.

Turn around again and move to the melange of architectural symbolism in Saraswati Renata's, *Anti-Gravity*, an installation in dulcet porcelain that builds boundaries between fine arts and ceramic canons. Saraswati's experience and ingenuity embellish the finesse of her work. Across the wall on the right is Japanese artist Hoshino Satoru's installation. Far from perfect, this is a freely expressed verve that celebrates intuitive expression, resonant rough hewn inner emotion, and the skilled symbiosis of form and natural-ity that lofts into pure sensation.

Natural ash-glazed wood-fired smoked earth ware greets your gaze in an enthralling spiral on the wall while a pinched black urn sits on the floor. Hoshino plays with the spectre of Zen minimalism even as his repetitive chant like manifestations take



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on an aura of spectral signatures in time that is transient and ephemeral. Hoshino is the perfect choice for the Ceramic Triennale.

Gaze through the glass, in the handkerchief garden is Rakhee Kane's *Shifting Identities*, 2018, two ceramic walls with metal structure 9ft x 9ft, 9ft x 4ft and a rammed earth wall in raw multicoloured clay. Kane creates corollaries within the mutations of clay as she recreates the jali of yesteryear. Kane unconsciously creates tall walls that celebrates the enormity of formalist abstractionism which indeed is an edifice inherited within the art of the modern ceramicist.

Then there is Shampa Shah's mercurial works – she has been having an affair with nature for the past two decades and creating works that have defined her practice. *Prithvi Sukta: Hymn for Planet Earth*, reflects a trans-cultural idiom with a universal emphasis, presenting a shared taste for primordial as well as archetypal impulses. She fires forms in the insignia of intuitive impulses, whose origins lie in humble everyday materials and processes geared to melding the aesthetic and the sculptural.

Of particular finesse in sculptural bal-

ance is Shirley Bhatnagar's *The Broken Promised* an installation of 50 tableware objects (objects of varying sizes), stoneware, porcelain and earthenware clays which breaks the spell of the studio-shaped fetish object. The quirks and twists in the quaint creations restore her art to the circuits of everyday life, in which the viewer does not remain passive but understands the organically motivated creative sojourn.

The success of these artists reveal to us a range of processes, both formal and informal, it also bears testimony to the truth that the vocabulary of ceramics consists of paradigms of low firing, hand-building, pinched smoke marks, cracks, holes, cavities, dents, lesions and surface impurities that extol the virtues of the world that lies between clay and skin. Ceramic artists are both comrades and collaborators in the world of clay; and gravity and time are their consorts.

**(Indian Ceramics Triennale: Breaking Ground, runs till November 18, 2018 at Jawahar Kala Kendra in Jaipur. It has been conceived by a six-member core team of mid-career ceramic artists - Anjani Khanna, Madhavi Subramaniam, Neha Kudchalikar, Sharbani Das Gupta, Reyaz Badaruddin & Vineet Kacker)**