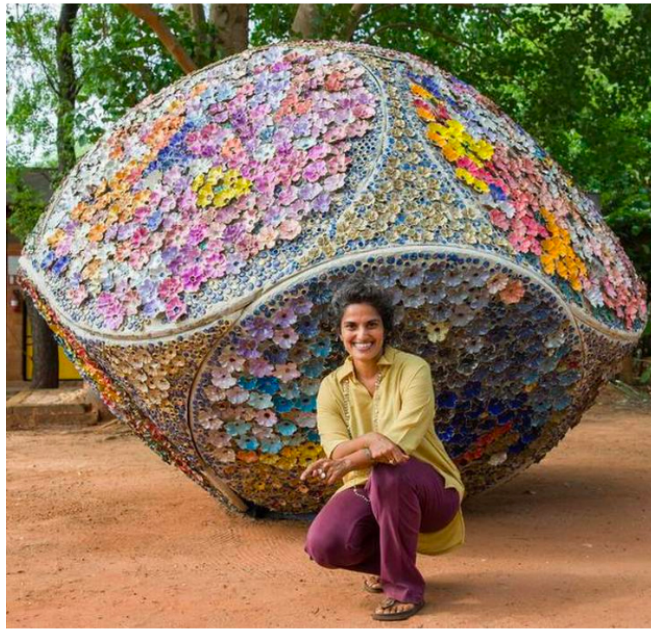


ART

One with the Earth



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MORE-IN

METROPLUS

These ceramic artists from Auroville are gearing up to display their works at the Indian Ceramics Triennale in Jaipur

Seven-feet-tall, twenty-feet long unfired clay structures, meticulously arranged to resemble a bar code. *A Deserted Barcode*, as the piece is aptly titled, connotative of consumerism, plays with a medium that combines Adil Writer's favourite genres: clay and acrylic on canvas. The veteran ceramic artist is one of the four artists from Auroville who will be featured in *Breaking Ground: Indian Ceramics Triennale 2018* at Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur.

The concept was born out of one of Adil's visits to China, that got him thinking about how consumerism is slowly taking over the world. While his tryst with clay is 20 years old, he started experimenting with clay paintings only a decade ago. "I do not think one ever stops being an architect. After finishing my Masters in Urban Design in Houston, and working as an architect for 12 years in Mumbai, I decided to move to Puducherry to study clay work," says Adil, who is currently a partner at Mandala Pottery in Auroville. "Clay took over my life actually, 80% of the work I do now consists of functional ceramic wear. The rest is what we call studio ceramics," he says.

Adil prefers to not concentrate on any specific technique: "The way I work with clay is similar to my cooking. I don't like to follow recipes. It just evolves over time." The artist says, "The conflict between art and craft is always going to be around in the country. In Sanskrit, there is no difference between art and craft. It's called *kala!* Most other countries too do not foster this difference. Over time, art has evolved to the point that people started giving it titles. Historically, this was never so."

While Priya Sundaravalli, one of the other artists from Auroville, believes that the fact that clay is a "low medium" is what makes it accessible to work on. She observes that Earth has always been considered the least important; this is evident in how we treat it. "Clay is something that has always been part of our lives, especially in India. Despite that, it is considered as a low material by some," says Priya, who started ceramic practice in 2012. The artist with a background in medical science and industrial engineering, recalls playing with coconut shells and mud after the rains, as a kid growing up in Madurai. She would create little statues with the gooey mud. This is probably when she realised her interest in this medium, she says. "Clay helps one connect with something very deep inside. It allows one to follow the act of solitude and prayer."

The artist's piece titled *Blossoming- Being all of them She stands there* takes references from an early poem in Nammazhvar's Thiruvaimozhi. "Being all of them – he, she, it, living/non-living, gendered/non-gendered – as a divine mother. It gave me goosebumps," the artist says.

"Clay is the right material to reconnect with the Earth," says Saraswati Renate whose piece, *Anti-gravity* intends to speak about subtle things that hold meaning and can be discovered only through a certain amount of effort. The 10 to 12-piece compilation of porcelain objects explores a minimalist approach. "I used to work on miniature objects, now I am trying to deviate from that to larger scale and proportions," she continues. A former journalist, Saraswati moved to Auroville in 2004 to work on ceramics.

The works of Adil, Priya and Saraswati will also be displayed on auroville.com on August 31.

Could there be influences from the location you will be working at?

We are all arriving a week early, and we will be visiting some key sites in Udaipur and Jodhpur. As a team, we will keep our eyes open to see if we can interpret the things that we see in the temporary workshop in Jaipur. We will also be on a lookout for interesting natural seeds, plants and fruit. We will plan to use them if it works out. Having worked together for many years, we have lots of little tricks up our sleeves already, and we are hoping to break new grounds while we are in this new and exciting atmosphere of Breaking Ground.

Nature inspires your work. When and how did it enter your art?

My father said that I studied flowers before I could walk. The magic and miracle that is nature never ceases to amaze me. I also look at many other things for inspiration, but it is nature that is at the heart, combined with the magic of the ceramic process which is nature itself - earth, air fire and water.

Has Indian flora and fauna too influenced your work?

Visiting India more than 20 times has affected my work in many ways - from looking carefully at nature, at temples carving, architecture - proportion especially of the Chola architecture. The quality of the art - the brilliance of the craftsmanship, the dexterity, and the truth to material, has inspired me. It is not just one thing that inspires me but it is the whole essence of India.

You make a clear distinction between your decorative work and public art. Do you approach them differently?

Yes, I do approach them differently. My decorative work comes truly from my own observations, from where I want. Public art, however, I feel has a responsibility to be site-specific and to be appropriate to the viewer. In the same way, as the teapot serves a function, public art serves a function...to inform, to make people aware, and to enhance the place. They are very different things - one of the biggest things being the scale, one of my decorative pieces can take one to two months, whereas a public art project can take years.

You also place a lot of emphasis on the faith of the process. Can you talk about it and how it has helped you all this while?

I very much believe in and letting the process lead the way, combining the skills that I have developed along with the knowledge. I believe that the process can offer opportunities and one does not have to be fixed on ideas before one starts. Making something is a series of decisions that are made during the process of making. Therefore, I am often surprised by things that I have made, for, they started with one intention and by the end of it, had changed completely.

What is the current status of ceramic art?

We do not realise how many times we encounter clay in a day. It is in our medicines, our kitchen utensils, our homes. It is used in engineering, space technology, medical technology and in arts and crafts. Recently, due to the work of some key figures in the ceramic art world, it is getting lot of attention.

At the moment, ceramics is really witnessing a renaissance in the English art scene. I feel quite strongly that India is at the start of this process and I hope that many people will enjoy looking at, using and making things from clay.

The first Indian Ceramics Triennale: Breaking Ground will be held at Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur, in collaboration with the Contemporary Clay Foundation from August 31-November 18. The event features 35 Indian and 12 international artist projects, 10 collaborations, 12 speakers, a symposium, film screenings and workshops for adults and children. For more details, visit www.indianceramicstriennale.com

More about Kate Malone

Kate is a studio potter regarded for her decorative works and public art works equally. She was a judge on BBC2's The Great Pottery Throw Down. She is also deeply engaged in glazing and is known for glazing and stoneware crystalline glazes. Kate creates works inspired by nature - fruits, nuts and seeds. Her work is on display at several public spaces and museums in the UK and across the world - a giant ceramic fish in the water at Hackney Marshes; a large pot at Manchester Art Gallery, a fountain at Homerton hospital and two pots at 10, Downing Street.

The leading ceramic artist who studied at Royal College of Art, London has her works in significant museums across the world. Apparently, she has the biggest kiln in London.