Torii Gateway and Enclosure – Dark Secrets /Archana Hebbar Colquhoun

The murder of Naina Sahni – shot dead by her husband and her body stuffed in a tandoor oven to be burnt to cinder at an upmarket restaurant in New Delhi coincided with my exhibition of Torii sculptures and paintings at the LTG gallery in June 1995.

The principal installation of a Torii gateway in this exhibition was made using wooden planks that were coated with a clay and straw mixture. The Torii structure was erected with supports of low brickwork walls arranged in the form of a courtyard of a traditional Indian home. The brick structure contained within its walls mini gateways made of two bricks placed upright with one horizontal brick placed across at the top, to create little entryways.

At the start of designing the installation, I had originally planned to place in the courtyard space a collection of moulded objects that acted as signifiers or markers of early human history.

This idea of attempting to depict the history of civilization suddenly gave way when I heard of a horrific “Breaking News” item of the Tandoor Murder case just as I was working on the installation.

After I heard the news, my work changed – the structure remained more or less the same as initially planned – but the contents that were to be placed in the courtyard were replaced by objects such as charred remains of coconut shells, other burnt articles, and a full head of a woman’s hair as if yanked in one stroke and flung at the foot of the Torii gateway.

The uploaded image shown below is a doctored one with two images of the same work almost mirroring each other. When the main Torii work was created in the gallery as an installation I had titled it “Boundaries of Experience.” Broadly speaking, the title still holds even after the intrusion – into my work in progress – of an unrelated subject that of a gruesome murder that took place at a walking distance from the gallery.

An important lesson I learnt from doing this show was that when an idea starts to take the shape as an art object a dynamic, external entity may completely hijack your carefully planned art work.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_Naina_Sahni

The original title of the work was “Boundaries of Experiences”