Spic Macay – Pt. Rajan Mishra – IIT Delhi Program



IIT Delhi, Diamond Jubilee Program 2021 April – May
The pandemic is growing rapidly all over the world. With aim of spreading hope and remembering **Pandit Rajan Mishra** ji (who passed away on the 25th of April), **SPIC MACAY** dedicates its online 3-day **IIT Delhi Diamond Jubilee year program** to him, the details of which are given in the link: https://spicmacay.org/rendezvousiitdelhidj

□□ April 30th, 6:00 pm, Friday:
Cinema Classic "Hirak Rajar Deshe" by Shri Satyajit Ray, followed by an interaction with the expert, Tuhinabha Majumdar ji
Link: bit.ly/smcinemaclassic

□□♂□1st May, 3:00 pm, Saturday Afternoon :
Great Masters Series- Vidwan Lalgudi G Jayaraman, followed by an interaction with G J R Krishnan ji

Link: bit.ly/smlivezoom

May 1st, 6:00 pm, Saturday Evening:
Classical Evening Series with Vidushi Nandini Bedekar (Hindustani vocalist)
Link: bit.ly/smlivezoom

May 2nd, 12 noon, Sunday:
Craft and Folk Series with Shri Rajaram Sharma (Pichwai Painting)
Link: bit.ly/smvolunteermeet

Madan Lal Gupta – Innovations in Bricks/Archana H Colquhoun

Using an integrated art methodology to study works of Madan Lal Gupta…..in conversation with Archana Hebbar Colquhoun

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Autumn Tree of Pleasure – Japan/Archana Hebbar Colquhoun

- **The Tree has a Symbolism that is Timeless and Universal in its Origins. The Expressions are limitless and found in all cultures and religions.**

The Bhagawad Gita (15.1)

Lord Krishna describes the divine Ashvattha tree, as that whose roots grow upwards and the branches of which extend downwards; its leaves are the sacred knowledge of the Vedas; the knower of this tree has attained the knowledge of the Vedas.

Carl Gustav Jung

“No tree, it is said, can grow to heaven unless its roots reach down to hell.”

The above two quotes, to me, point to the limitless ways in which the symbolism of a tree can be expressed.

I would like to place my painting “Autumn Tree of Pleasure” within the context of the extensive symbolism that the Tree has generated in our imagination.

In this essay, I would like to talk about the visual devices I used in the painting of the autumn tree to depict time, movement, **and the part that memory plays in the creation of an artwork.** I painted the ‘autumn tree’ before I moved back to India, at the turn of the century.

- **Materials used in the painting**

The autumn tree is painted on an imperial size card sheet with charcoal, pastels, acrylic paints, and a bit of turmeric for the yellow – or is the yellow pigment not turmeric?

The quality and range of paper types, including the sizes and formats of cut and rolled paper that I encountered in Japan filled me with such joy and amazement that I switched from sculpture and installation art to painting, for a time.

- **The Tree and the Painting**



In the painting, **I wanted to show** – most of all – **the movement of falling leaves**.

Fall is another name for **autumn**.

A tree shedding its autumnal leaves*, the shade of* ***kumkum*** *red – deep, rich, dense, and tactile –* ***is an annual spectacle of nature*** *that is witnessed only in some parts of the world, which have a temperate climate.*

- **My relationship with the tree**

Coming from the tropics i.e. southern India, I found **the concept of the four seasons** not just novel but in some respects alien.

After the first few years of living in Japan, I began to form my own, personal relationship with each of the **four seasons** that came and went in a regular cycle, without exception, every year.

Summer is perhaps the least favourite season for most people in Japan and it was the same for me.

Of the other three seasons – the soft, gentle **spring**, preceded by a cold, crisp, snowy **winter**, and the third the **autumn** with the grandeur of its colours and dazzling hues – **is my most inspirational.**

- **Picking a singular iconic image of a tree and blotting out the surrounding panoramic stretch**

The subject of the painting, **The Autumn Tree of Pleasure**, which I painted after having lived through several Japanese autumns, harked back to an image (of a painting of an autumn tree) that was already present in my mind as a vivid and abiding memory, for more than a decade, before I visited Japan and made the country my second home.

I am referring here to the well-known Indian miniature painting titled "**Squirrels in a Chinar Tree**" by the master painter **Abu'l-Hasan** (see NOTE below) who worked in the Mughal emperor, Jahangir's atelier in the seventeenth century. The Chinar tree grows in the valleys of Kashmir and is considered to be a symbol of Kashmir's rich, cultural and environmental heritage.

I was introduced to this painting in my art history classes in Baroda. The **shape of the leaves** of the Chinar tree, the **flame-red hue** of many of them (alongside the green leaves) depicted in the Mughal miniature painting, I found puzzling and fascinating. This was a tree in the early stages of an autumnal metamorphosis. Such a tree, where leaves seemed to take the place of flowers because of their distinctive colours, I had never seen in southern India.

[NOTE: *The work is sometimes attributed to the artist Mansur or considered to be a collaborative work by the two artists. In any case, works of art not only in India but also in Europe were the result of collective work by trainee artists and artisans who worked under the auspices of a single master to whom then the work of art would be attributed. The painting is in the collection of a museum outside India as are a large number of other masterpieces of Indian art. A simple Internet search will disclose all necessary information on the painting. Due to copyright restrictions I have not included an image of the painting, which is titled in most cases "**Squirrels in a Plane Tree**."*]

- **The Chinar tree and my painting**

The **Chinar tree** belongs to the family of **Plane trees** and resembles the **Japanese maple tree**. It is considered to be an endangered species going by the rapidly decreasing numbers of the tree in Kashmir. One of the features of the **Chinar tree** is its **deep and extensive root growth** that covers a ground area

larger than the spread of its tree top. The bifurcation of the tree trunk into roots is visible just above the ground level where the tree rises in its magnificence.

The roots of a **Chinar tree** need to breathe and be able to draw nutrients and generous amounts of water from the surrounding soil for its survival, healthy growth, and longevity. When road construction and building works are carried out close to and right above the ground area where the roots of the Chinar tree lie **the death of the tree from suffocation and starvation soon follows**.

- **A Pictorial Analysis of the painting "An Autumn Tree of Pleasure" through Q & A**

Q1. What sort of a tree is the ***Autumn Tree of Pleasure***, is it a Chinar tree?

A1. The tree in the painting is a generic, deciduous tree that sheds its leaves in the **autumn** but before it starts to bare its branches, a performance takes place whereby the **green leaves turn** into a **golden yellow followed by a deep orange, and/or finally a blood-red hue**.

Q2. How did this painting come about?

A2. I can best answer the question in the form of a **sequence diagram** using words and symbols as follows:

a ***memory*** **+** a ***life experience*** **→** a **memory retrieval through synchronic activation** within the brain **↔** a ***motivation to create*** = the ***final art work***

Note: It is a mystery as to why only certain memories and or life experiences lead to the production of an artwork, especially when the artwork is purely self-motivated and is not a work that is commissioned by a patron.

Q3. How is **movement** depicted in the **painting**? What **pictorial devices** do you employ to **show movement** in a **static, two-dimensional representation** of an image?

A3. The following **four elements** are used to depict movement in the painting.

- Wind
- Shifting axis in the composition
- Suggestion of Time through placement of pictorial elements on the picture surface
- Change in pigmentation

1**. Wind creates movement** which in turn disturbs the leaves, dislodging them from the branches, and speeds up the process of the falling of the leaves.

2**. Diagonal lines** in a composition can also be used to **show movement**. In the painting the branches of the tree are drawn in sweeping, rightward curves the arcs pointing downwards.

3. **Time represents movement**. The passing of time is inferred from the position of the leaves painted as individual elements in a random pattern at varying levels within the painting, which shows the descent of the leaves to the ground at different times.

4. **Change in pigment** can also indicate the passing of time. The leaves on the ground are painted dark red the colour of dried blood and it can be understood that the leaves have been on the ground for some time, in contrast to the brighter red of the leaves that are shown airborne.

The painting, *Autumn Tree of Pleasure,* to me represents the tragic history of Kashmir. The region was considered a paradise on earth, depicted as such in countless paintings and in the romantic song sequences of Indian movies till just a few decades ago.

As a visual artist, *I have so far rarely repeated an artistic idea or a form, unless I am in the process of exploring the various facets and permutational possibilities of the idea.* Use of different materials comes into play when I want to express an idea through different media – paintings, sculptures, art installations etc.



A variation on the autumn tree is a painting which I made

using only the red viscous liquid that comes in a tiny tube with a dipper for painting a ***bindi*** – a red dot or an elongated line on the forehead, which is commonly used in India by women as a chief element of facial makeup.

I sometimes refer to the painting as **A Red Tree**, which I painted very soon after painting **The Autumn Tree of Pleasure**.

Photo Credit: **Arun Visweswaran**

The X factor of Installation Art/Archana Hebbar Colquhoun

Installation Art

I would like to quote from the **Tate glossary of art terms** a definition of **Installation Art**.

"Mixed-media constructions or assemblages usually designed for a specific place and for a temporary period of time"

This definition is broad, succinct and most suitably describes many of my installation works. One example is the ***Altar,*** an installation work in which I bring together paintings, sculptural works in wood and brass, bricks, and a temple bell that I displayed at a gallery in New Delhi, **as a single work**.



However, the presentation features of an art installation allow an artist to mix and match artworks and objects and present what might be *a hybrid collection* of works as ***one homogenous whole***. The arrangement and display of the works and

objects are designed by the artist (not by a curator) and the completed assemblage would result in a new, **composite work** – an art installation bearing the name of the artist as its creator.

Installation art throws up rich and exciting possibilities for artistic expression.

I would like to present a descriptive analysis of the installation work titled ***Altar***. The installation consists of four discrete components: the centrepiece; the pedestal; the paintings; and a temple bell.

The Centrepiece – a Torii gateway with Obstacles

The main component of the installation, **the centrepiece**, is a Torii gateway with chained objects suspended from the top-centre of the gateway; the objects acting as an obstacle to entry.



The main advantage of installation art is that an artist can create multiple works of "installation" using the same set of (art) objects by assembling them in different compositions and playing around with the placements of the objects. The

possibilities for innovation are virtually limitless. The centrepiece of the present installation consists of four detachable pieces: the Torii gateway and three small brass sculptures, connected by chains – acting as **an obstacle**.

The obstacle consists of one main part – *a Z-shaped form* and an auxiliary part – *two forms* resting on the base of the Torii gateway connected on either side by a chain to the suspended Z-shaped form. The *two forms* (not clearly seen in the featured photograph) are sculptural expressions of a slipper and a footprint in 3D form. The three forms (of a hand-held size) are in fact three independent sculptural works, which can be displayed individually or in combination with other related works.

[Note: I made a series of small sculptural works, cast in brass, all of which can be connected to one or more works, interchangeably, using chains. A discussion about these works would form the subject of a separate article.]

The Pedestal

The centrepiece, the Torii gateway, rests on a dry wall of bricks, within which is a niche acting as the sanctum sanctorum of a temple with an architectural feature of a step leading into the small, vertical hollow in the wall.



Sculptural works, unless very large, are always placed on a pedestal in a gallery setting. The use of a brick construction instead of a wooden pedestal box to display the Torii sculpture opens up the meaning of **the work** (consisting of the Torii and the brick wall) since the pedestal becomes a part of the work. The brick wall, on which the Torii gateway is placed, can be seen as depicting **sacred architecture that has a sculptural component**, the Torii. If the Torii was placed on a wooden display pedestal instead of a brick wall it would be seen as a (simple*) work of sculpture.

The brick wall plays a transformative role in terms of meaning and construction within the installation.

* I use the term “simple” not as a qualitative description of the art of sculpture but as a depth of vision employed in reading a work of art.

[Note: The bricks used in this installation are common burnt clay bricks made and used in India for constructing houses and other small buildings. The bricks are **backing bricks** (as opposed to **facing bricks –** used as a veneer**)** and they require rendering with mortar to hold them in place and need plastering once a wall is built.

The dry brick wall on which the centrepiece of the present installation rests can easily be taken down without damaging the bricks and the bricks put to use for which they were made originally. The bricks in the dry wall in the installation do not sit flush on and against each other as no mortar is used to build the wall.

Paintings of Torii gateways with Obstacles

I explored further the subject of the main (sculptural) component of the (Torii gateway) installation in paintings. The two paintings hanging on the wall, above the centrepiece, one to the left are from a series of paintings the idea for which came to me after I had done a body of Torii sculptural works. The paintings are of a slightly later date.



The main subject of the paintings is the two-part form of an “obstacle.” Although the form of the Torii no longer appears in the paintings the top edge of the painting is suggestive of the existence of a Torii gateway.

The paintings are self-explanatory, except that they are titled *“Herbal Paintings”* – an entirely new category of works. As I continued to explore the theme of the “Torii with obstacles” in a 2D medium the principal focus of the works shifted to the pigments I chose to use in making the paintings. The subject matter of a Torii with obstacles that

was the source of the paintings became incidental to the painted works, a mere vestige of an earlier idea.

The pigments used in the paintings are turmeric, kumkum, henna, and kaajal (organic eyeliner paste).

[***Note:*** Turmeric and the red kumkum powder are indispensable to any ritual performed in a temple, and are considered sacred.]

A Bronze Temple Bell

The presence of the temple bell in the installation not only points to another series of works titled "**Sound Sculptures**" but also transforms the meaning of the installation, just as the brick wall does.

Many of the small sculptural works described earlier in the essay (the obstacles in the Torii) are in fact examples of **sound sculptures**. When the original clay or plaster forms of the sculptural works were cast in brass I asked the artisan to place a tiny stone inside the hollow of the brass works so as to create a sound (as does a child's rattle) when the object is picked up by a viewer for closer inspection.

The fact that these brass works incorporate the element of sound is not evident unless a viewer is already familiar with the works. The bell acts as a connecting thread to the sound element hidden in the brass sculptures.

The (hybrid) collection of works featured in the installation present a meaning that is *concentric*.

The temple bell with its definitive meaning provides a trajectory through which the viewer comes to see the installation as one that represents **sacred space**.

The temple bell and the bricks are two components of the installation that are obviously **not** made by me. This is one advantage of installation art where works and objects not made by the artist can be presented in a 3D assemblage along with

other works without the artist being accused of misappropriation.

There is no possibility of doubt in the viewer's mind as to the origin and identity of the temple bell and the utilitarian bricks, both of which are integral to the installation.

Conclusion

The works and objects of one installation can be presented in a different combination in another installation and context. In one installation the same set of objects can be displayed in a grouping that is intended to convey one primary meaning but when presented in a different combination (irrespective of the display space) the installation could express a statement that could not be read from a construction of an earlier installation, which consisted of the exact same set of objects.

For example, if the temple bell was not hung above the centrepiece but placed on the floor, upright or on its side, it would change the meaning of the work, almost entirely.

A number of other issues to be discussed and clarified with respect to this installation arise in my mind, although the essay has now come to its end.

No writing on an artwork can and will be conclusive.

Torii gateways and shadows/Archana Hebbar

Colquhoun

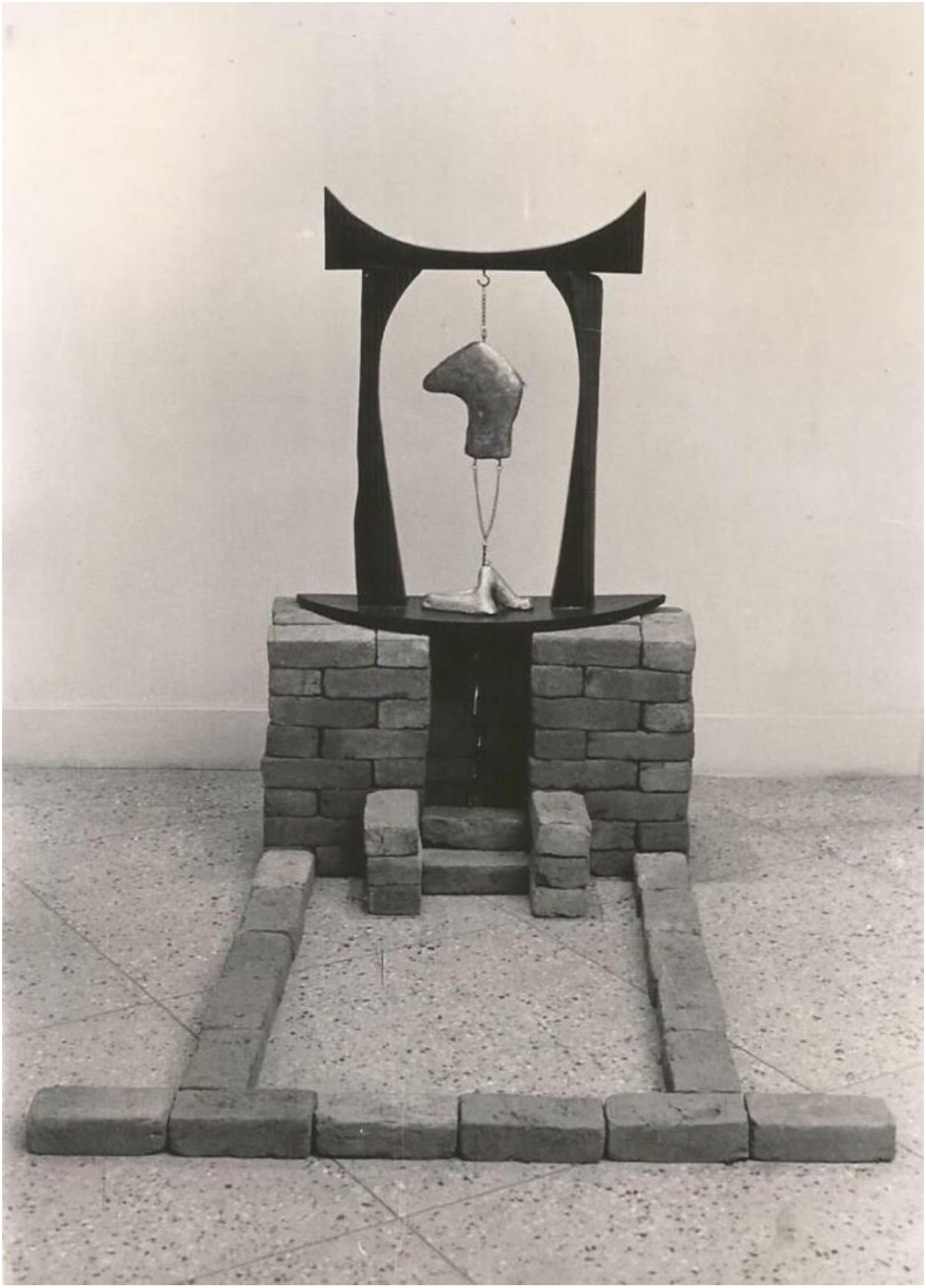
Depicting the ephemeral shadow through three-dimensional form – Torii sculptures and Installations

Innovations in visual language that surfaced from my subconscious, which I discuss in this write-up relate to the play of light and shadows. In two-dimensional artworks, we can see how shadows are painted and how they form an integral part of the composition of the work. Pigments are used to delineate the space occupied by the shadow and the presence of the shadow in an artwork is invested with special meaning; namely, the dark shadow self lurking within and around an entity.

I was curious to find newer methods to depict a shadow using three dimensional form, by placing objects that have formal resemblance to the main object in the work in arrangements that are both playful as well as carefully considered so as to act as a novel visual device.

Below are two works of Torii installations in which I have tried to demonstrate alternative ways of depicting shadows.

Torii with a line of bricks constituting a shadow



When in the presence of light each solid object throws out a shadow.

The shadow is just a visual echo of the object and represents only the outer boundary of the form of the object. Within the flat, linear shape of the shadow no formal details are seen of the actual object.

The shadow is errant by its very nature. Presenting an object as a simple outline the shadow entirely erases the object’s rich surface content and replaces the textures of the object by the texture of the ground on which the shadow falls.

Torii sculpture displayed in a tent with a framed drawing acting as a shadow of the Torii sculpture



In each of the two works of the Torii gateway (shown above) the capricious shadow is embodied in material form. In one work the shadow is represented as a line of bricks imitating the form of the Torii displayed on a dry wall of bricks and in the other work (displayed inside a tent) the shadow is a framed drawing of a Torii lying flat on the floor, face up, at the foot of the tori sculpture. The shadows of the tori gateways in both works deviate from the form of the actual art object.

A shadow is an illusion with a life form of its own.

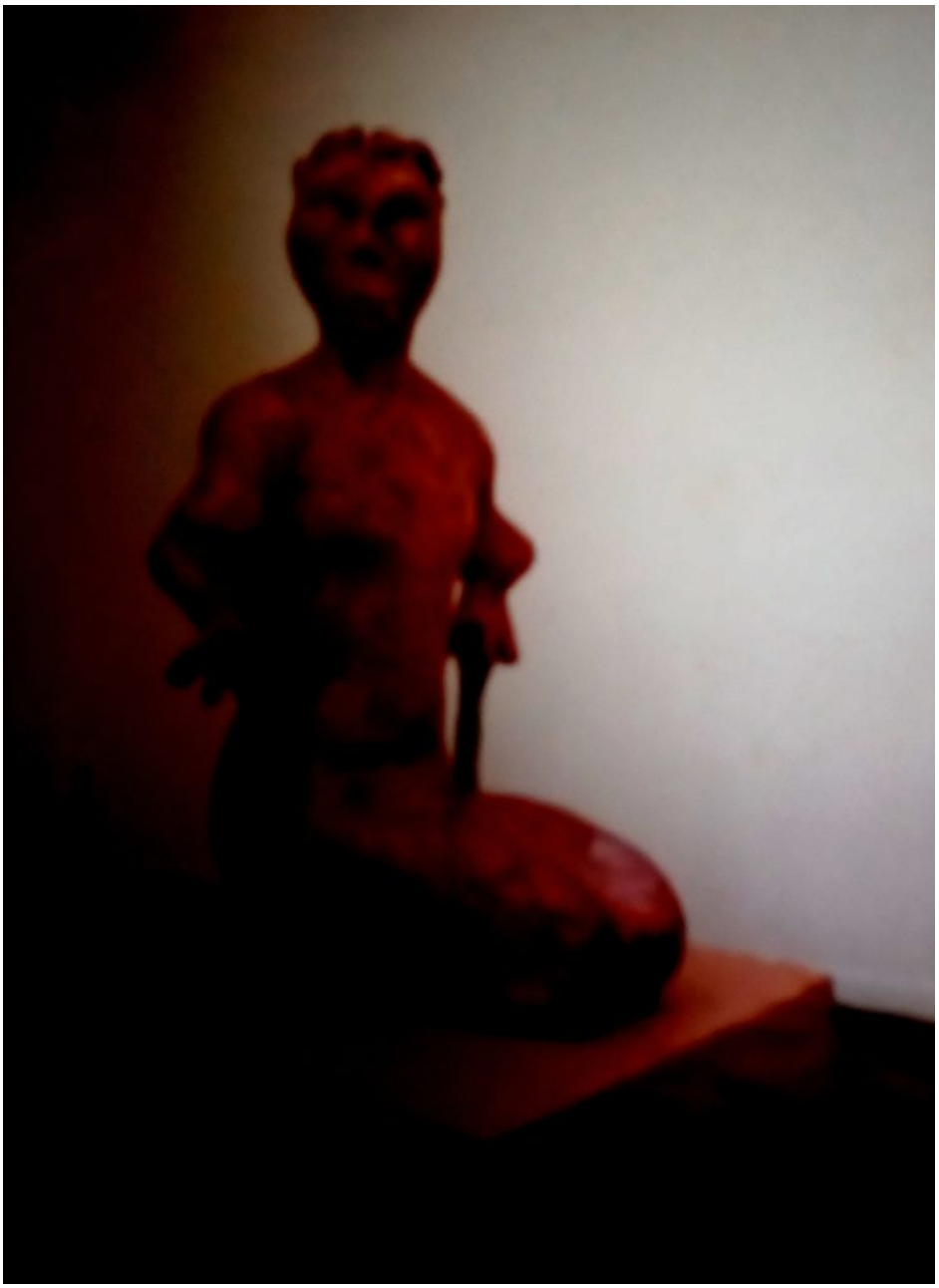
Renowned Sculptor, Jyotsna Bhatt, passes away

Known to be one of India’s best-known ceramic artists, Baroda-based Bhatt breathed her last on July 11, two days after she suffered a stroke. She was 80. “She was a gentle and generous person, who made wonderful work. A nodal figure for artists working in ceramics, her works received wide recognition and she would often travel to conduct workshops across the country,” says artist Nilima Sheikh.

Social Distancing or Physical

Distancing? / Archana Hebbar Colquhoun

a sculptural representation



Seated Man

Covid-19 and Social Distancing

The current global coronavirus pandemic leading to COVID-19 shows no signs of dying a natural death; far from it, we are nowhere near finding a solution to arresting the spread of the virus. The virus appeared mysteriously and suddenly, infected some, multiplied rapidly, hitch-hiked by various means and entered all parts of the world – sparing no region. It underwent numerous mutations during its journey around Planet Earth and half a year later still stays firmly away from the grasp of human comprehension.

This uncontrolled, worldwide pandemic has completely transformed our lives and we have come up with one rather simple behavioral method and the only known effective one so far to cope with this situation. The world's lingua franca has given it the name "Social Distancing." The English language is highly adaptive. But the language is also very adept at coining specious terms. These terms are then taken up unquestioningly by anyone speaking any language, anywhere in the world.

I would like to discuss, using one of my sculptural works, the connotative meanings of the term "Social Distancing." As a more suitable term to use in the COVID-19 context, I would suggest the term "Physical Distancing.

A Sculptural representation

The subject of this article is a sculpture of a seated man. It is the third in the series of five sculptures that I made in Tokyo, in the late 80s. These sculptures are based on specific people I saw on the streets of "Calcutta," in the early to mid-80s. I did not and could not strike up a conversation with any of them. Perhaps I did not have the strength of spirit to connect with them through verbal communication. I had my own problems and I felt just as helpless as they did or perhaps

they did not even feel the same sort of disempowerment I felt. They were, for all I know, stronger in spirit than most and had the mental strength to accept their condition and live a functional life with a reasonable level of happiness and fulfillment.

The reason for the absence of an interaction with any of the individuals I saw and passed by on the streets of Calcutta that year in the early to mid-80s was revealed to me gradually, over the years. This happened through certain specific experiences I had with people, belonging to different groups, in various countries. These experiences were, what I would call, mundane and of little import when taken from the point of view of a day to day existence. To me, however, they were eye openers. These experiences signified to me the true meaning of the currently much bandied about term "Social Distancing."

I posted a write-up about my second sculpture in the series, *crawling man*, titled "The World on its Hands and Knees," since the person the sculpture was modeled on represented to me the condition that all of us are in now – our lives ruthlessly controlled by a global pandemic caused by a bio-chemical entity, the coronavirus, that exists in that nebulous state between living and nonliving.

The fear of COVID-19 is real, palpable, and terrifying because we have no understanding of the workings of the coronavirus. A term with a very specific meaning has been coined to describe the physical distance each of us needs to maintain with everyone except for the few people with whom we share a living space, excluding even your blood relatives if they happen to live in separate accommodation.

This **physical distancing** is termed "**Social Distancing**."

Social Distancing vs Physical Distancing

“Social Distancing” is entirely erroneous as a term to describe the sort of distancing we need to maintain between each other during this pandemic. The ‘distancing’ is necessary so as to not catch the virus from people with whom interaction is unavoidable, termed essential workers, and spreading the virus to other individuals.

Social Distancing as a practice is nothing new; it has always existed in all societies, in one form or another. It is implemented and controlled by a small minority of agents of power, be they the ruling elite, the strong amongst the weak etc. Using the term **“Social Distancing”** in the present situation to describe a **prescriptive behavioral form** of maintaining physical distance to avoid spreading of **COVID-19** that applies to ***all***, irrespective of their social standing, performs the task of validating, insidiously, the deep social divide, wide-spread all over the world. The term gives credence to the **institutionally managed** segregation of communities that disempowers large groups of people based on their color, ethnicity, economic standing, gender, etc., and people with physical disabilities. These groups of people live a **socially distanced** life. I have not included other groups or even people with disabilities that are not to do with the visible physical body, in this discussion.

Persons with physical disabilities

Among the many disempowered groups of people, such as those listed above and others, it is the group of people with physical disabilities that are uniquely placed as the ones whose lives are more severely affected by social isolation and the resulting **social distancing**. A person with physical disabilities is a single individual, often experiencing a

sense of separation even within their own family. Although living a **socially distanced** life like many other groups of people, a person with a physical disability is **alone in their disability** as each form of disability is different from another. The extent and nature of the disability depends on individual factors and the person with a disability **does not belong to a clearly identifiable collective**.

Examples of a 'collective' would be an ethno-racial social group or a community of economically deprived families, living in ghettoized, marginalized conditions. Accordingly, a person with disabilities lacks the emotional support system that individuals belonging to other disempowered groups with shared problems and a common identity have.

The social and emotional isolation of people with a physical disability may be the result of congenital factors, of deliberate acts of cruelty, accidents, and even more shockingly and tragically due to poorly understood medical treatments. These treatments are administered hastily, not having been properly verified but widely hailed as effective, and any side-effects resulting from the treatment, which may be severe and irreversible are identified only when the damage is already done.

As mentioned earlier, physical disabilities can include a whole range of conditions, including ones that are not readily visible to others or those that entirely escape the notice of people who are strangers to the person with a disability.

A physical disability of a particular kind and why it became the subject of my sculptures

The form of physical disability I chose to highlight through the set of five sculptures belong to the one category of

people (four of the sculptures referring to actual individuals I saw), who are either born with or developed later in life anomalies (*in medical terms a "deformity*") in their bodily structure. Their limbs, extremities, and craniofacial features affect how they are viewed by others and the bodily movement and functionalities of the people in this category are restricted to various degrees. Often, the stark visual nature of their physical characteristics, entirely unique to each individual and the disabilities being specifically their own, marks them apart from others. They are denied a sense of belonging to a community. Inarguably, the social and emotional isolation that the people in this group experience compounds their day to day difficulties and increases their dependency on others. The subject was compelling and I was and still am deeply affected by the life situation of people with disabilities who have readily visible "malformations" of the body.

Before I talk about my sculpture, *seated man,* and the form and content of the work, I would like to make clear my rationale and impetus behind selecting, as subjects of my artwork, people with physical characteristics that restrict their mobility and whose body structure does not conform to expected norms. If the motivation for doing the set of sculptures is not already evident from the foregoing discussion, I would like to stress that by doing these works I want to bring to light the pain and suffering of these individuals, **which is singularly their own**.

These set of sculptures may be deemed voyeuristic, distasteful, and even lacking in basic human sensitivity and compassion on the part of the artist. This is one reading of the work, and from the point of view of the artist, that is me, the reading reflects the reader's/viewer's own point of view, which does not allow them to extend their understanding of what an art work stands for, the compelling motivations of the artist for doing works of this kind, and the complex web

of meanings the artwork holds. These meanings of the artworks constantly change and come to light depending on the context in which they are presented and the nature of the audience. There may be no specific target audience in the mind of the artist when a work is created, unless the work is commissioned by a specific patron with clear-cut requirements. My set of works are entirely self-motivated and created with no specific audience in mind.

It is my conjecture that the *seated man*, who in all probability was homeless, had a congenital condition that caused the shortening of his arms but evidently with strong musculature in the upper and forearms, both structurally relocated and joined in such a way as to provide for an elbow function. The formation of the arms had a certain degree of symmetry, in that the arms had the same proportion and structurally related to the rest of the body in a similar manner.

The Sculpture of a *seated man*



A seated man, homeless perhaps, his posture is almost that of a yogi. His torso is upright and handsome. He sits with his legs folded under in the yoga pose of *Vajrasana,* holding a stick in one hand for support. His arms are strong, although

shortened. They are connected securely to his shoulders in a "standard" anatomical position. His head is turned sideways to view something that he caught sight of from the corner of his eyes. He used his very own form of transport, a little trolley, which I edited out from the sculpture. This I did so as to give prominence to the figure of the man who bore himself with dignity to the extent he could, given his circumstances. The trolley would have been a distraction and would have drawn attention to his disability.

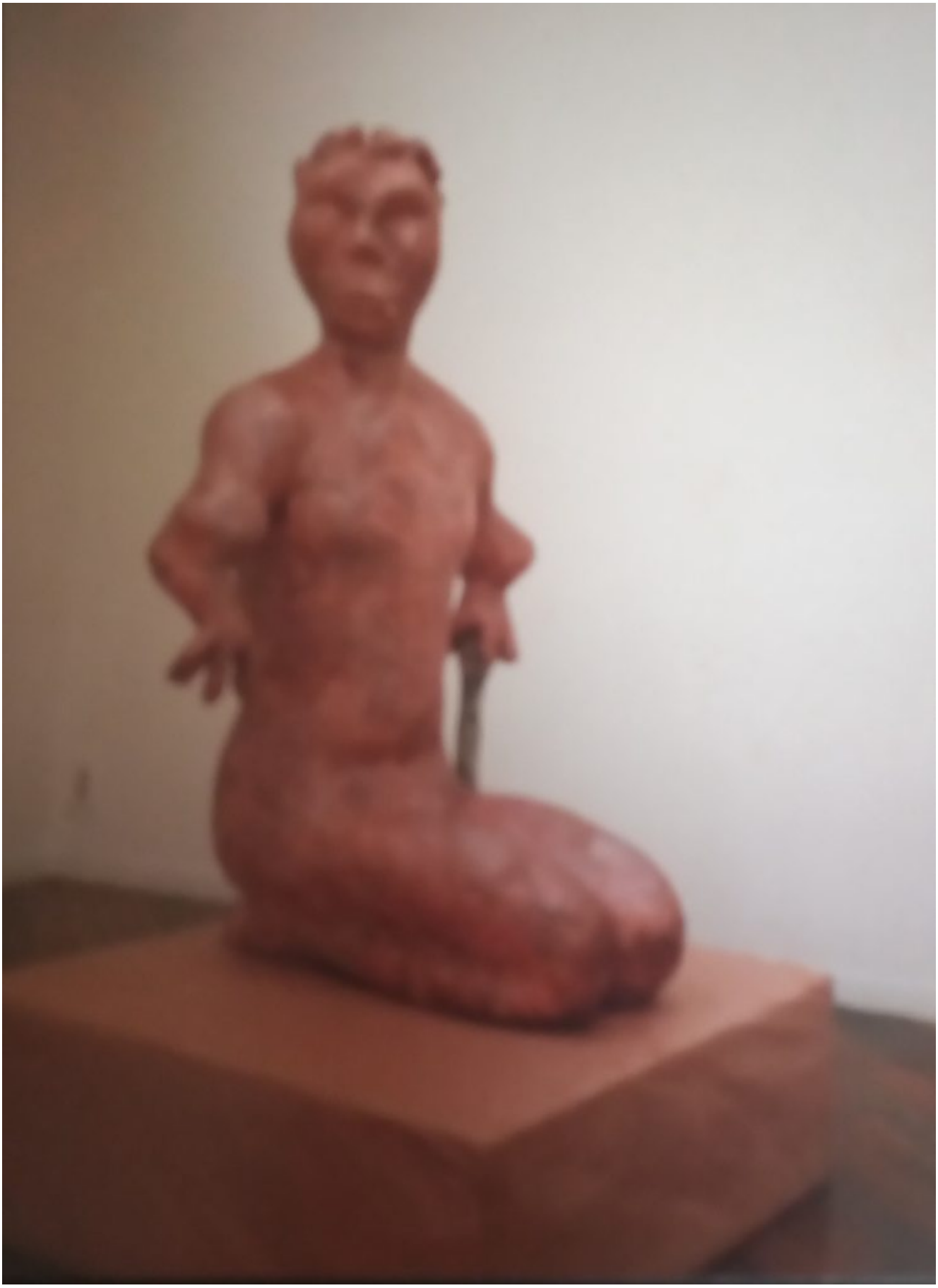
Whatever innate dignity his physical demeanor may have presented, he was still an outcast – homeless, living on the streets, and displaying those physical features that the vast majority of people could not relate to and from whom they maintained a clear social distance.

The social distancing of people such as the *seated man* has no relation to the "Social Distancing" prescribed by the governments of all countries for tackling COVID-19. What is needed in the present circumstances is "Physical Distancing."

If the indignity of a subtle form of social distancing was not enough, the *seated man* spending most of his time on the pavement had people walking past him, occasionally tossing a few coins in his bowl, who practiced a more blatant form of "physical distancing;" whereby, when they passed him on the street, they kept a distance that was more than necessary. This they did to make certain that they avoided contact with him. They walked past him by making a wide arc of a semi-circular curve using a quick motion to go past him, in the shortest possible time.

Practicing social distancing in relation to people isolated from the mainstream of society existed way before COVID-19 gripped our lives.

Displaying the work in an art gallery



In order to express the combined qualities of dignity and social isolation of the *seated man*, the figure was placed directly on the floor of the gallery on the first day of the

show, and from the second day of the show until the closing of the show the figure was placed on a pedestal, which not only isolated him but also provided him with an elevating platform, giving him the dignity he deserves.

The World on its Hands and Knees | Archana Hebbar Colquhoun

A Sculptural Representation of Covid-19



The timeline of the global pandemic of the coronavirus and its deadly manifestation as Covid-19 needs no introduction. The scale and the enormity of the destruction caused by Covid-19, the speed at which this large-scale culling of human beings –

not in anyone’s living memory – with no resolution in sight, has brought the world down on its hands and knees.

As a visual artist, my mind could only think in images in order to make sense of this holocaust-like situation and there rose from my memory a sculpture of a crawling man, which I had made more than three decades ago.

I made this sculpture in 1987 after I moved to Tokyo and I had absolutely no desire whatsoever to write about another artist’s work, having worked as an art critic in New Delhi. I decided to change the course of my life and become an artist. I started working in a small back room of my two-room apartment in Tokyo. I bought large blocks of a caustic material – polystyrene, to carve life-size figures. All of the figures had irregularities in their physical form and each image/figure was based on a specific person I had seen, moving around on the streets of Calcutta (of the early to-mid 80s). The sculpture that I will be referring to is my second life-size sculpture that I ever created. I hadn’t studied sculpture in Baroda, but my seven year-long study of art history enabled me, without my knowledge, to simply pick up the necessary tools and material and create sculptures of people, based on realistic figuration, a task for which I had no prior training. The sculptures were made out of a poisonous material, taking on human forms with congenital or deliberately created ‘malformations’ in the body, for which life models are not readily available, unless the very person I saw posed for me as a model. This meant that the forms had to be drawn purely from my memory along with a bit of imagination to crystalize the form. But, earlier I did say that these sculptures were based on actual people I had seen. I made a set of five figure sculptures, including one of a new born baby. I was, at that time, almost certain that I would not have a child – I wasn’t made to be a mother. This has been proven wrong.

In this set of five figures there is one exception. This work

is purely from my imagination, a form I have never ever seen in real life, and which is based on one of my life experience that to this day makes its presence felt in my conscious and subconscious mind with decreasing intensity over the years.

I will now come to the sculpture, which is the subject of this article and which is the second one in the series of five sculptures.



Although the figure is based on someone I actually saw on a Calcutta street – and froze for a few moments when I happened to set eyes on him – and the memory of him to this day is still a strong presence, I needed to use models to carve a sculpture of the man. The person I saw should have been provided medical help, perhaps earlier on in his life, given equipment that was suitably devised for his particular needs, and an opportunity for social integration. It was the lack of any form of institutional support for the man, left to his own devices to function on the streets that stopped me in my tracks when I encountered him, while other pedestrians walked

past him and took no notice. I didn’t have to stand there studying the form of the man to memorize his stance and mobility. He was not a spectacle for me but an individual, just as myself, who happened to catch my eye only very briefly but that brief encounter has had a lasting impression on me. It is a mystery to even the most seasoned practitioner of the visual arts as to why a certain image enters their consciousness and makes a home for itself in the deep recesses of their memory.

Polystyrene is the medium of all five sculptures in the group. The medium itself symbolizes the near-evil destructive potential of the myriad man-made materials enveloping the earth, in an embrace of death.

The figure, as mentioned earlier, although drawn from memory so vivid as to compel me to give it tangible form, required that I use life models who could hold the twisted posture of the figure that I wanted to carve. A model was necessary, especially in the case of this sculpture, for me to be able to study the skeletal framework of the figure that would lend itself to such contortion, observe the stress, and tension of the musculature in the limbs and the torso, with the neck craning upwards so the head could rise up to look at what is above the eye level.

The sculpture is of a man, who can move only by crawling on his hands and knees, his head trying perpetually to look at what could have been and what he may have been able to attain in his life if he had been blessed with a skeletal frame and an arrangement of limbs that would allow him “normal” physical movements. His limbs were skinny and bent in unexpected places and the angles fixed and rigid.

Yes, this is a sculpture of a man (my models for the sculpture being both male and female – friends of mine) the man crawling on his hands and knees, almost entirely without clothes, dragging his miserable collection of body parts along the

rough, dusty, broken stones of a pavement but he appeared determined to continue on with his life.

This figure of a crawling man, almost helpless and completely without hope of any improvement in his circumstances, symbolizes to me the state that the greatest of world leaders and every single human being is reduced to today, by COVID-19. The coronavirus has brought the whole world down to its hands and knees.

In my next article in the series on Covid-19, I will take up the issue of “Social Distancing,” a term that is problematic due to its various negative connotations. The subject of the article will be another one of my sculptures from the series of five, titled “Seated Man.”

Significance of Props- Gouri Nilakantan



Loosely described as, “objects used by the actor and those that are placed on stage” props are considered important as long as they serve on the stage. After the show is over very little attention is given over them and they are loosely packed and kept until further usage. How many of us have wondered about its deeper significance? Do we even for one look closely at “ the skull held by Hamlet” or the “ crystal glass unicorn held by Laura” in Glass Menagerie? Even once does the director care to explain to the actor for him/her to closely touch and feel the object as not only a part of the text but also beyond the whole text. It should provide a moment of heightened emotion not only for the actor themselves but also for the audience. Every object is to be placed by the set designer and the director with great fortitude and understanding.

The Natyasastra states that natya was created to meet the demand of a plaything, it’s a “ Krida” (a source of pleasure and diversion to boredoms, wants the miseries of daily existence). Therefore an art form can induce a temporary state of diversion of one’s immediate sorrow and an escape into a world of pleasure and happiness. Nataka or drama can do this more efficiently than other art form, because unlike other arts, it is both drisya and sravya, it has visual and aural appeal. It can satisfy us by graceful or spetacular senses presented on the stage, can gratify our ear or heart. This is efficient only through props that makes the experience of the audience go beyond his reality.

Andrew Sofer, in his book, “ The Stage life of Props” says that, “ the object must be seen as having a sign.” The stage props hence has a strong presence, sometimes as strong as the actor themselves. As Felix Bossonnet sees the props they are much more than the physical presence they hold. Props have to be read between the complex relationship between the actor the text and the audience. It provides a complete whole experience of transmission of the audience into the world of

the “ play or krida”. As Sofer sees the distinctions between the props and the characters should become more and more blurred, it should be amalgamated as one whole. The responsibility of this hence is not just within the text but by the directors as well as the actors.

The Belgian Embassy: A Masterpiece Revisited / Seema Bawa

This multi domed, arched, brick complex on Shanti Path is not only a landmark that defines the Delhi landscape but is perhaps also a watershed in Indian architecture. As such the Belgian Embassy has evoked heated debate amongst the practitioners of architecture over the period of two decades, since the time of its design in 1980.

Much of the controversy is focussed around the fact that Satish Gujral, its designer is not a professional architect. Going down memory lane, Gujral recalls that his interest in architecture was derived from his engrossment with the mural as a medium of public art. With this came the conviction that a mural, a painting or a sculpture to be successful in a building has to come form a single vision- “breathe from the single lung,” as he puts it. For this he had to design the building himself. In order to achieve this “I started to assist the architects of projects in which I was doing the murals, ” reminiscences Gujral. His early training in the Lahore art institution also came in handy where the curriculum had included draughtsmanship, carpentry, metalwork and the like.

With this came the conviction that instead of bringing art to the public place as through a mural, the need was to make the public place a work of art by itself. So after designing few residences, he submitted his design in a competition to build the Belgian Embassy in Chankyapuri in New Delhi.

The Embassy unlike most buildings is not oriented to the center of the plot. Instead the four major units are in all corners of the semi triangular shaped plot- the Ambassadors Residence, the Chancery, the Counsel's' residence and the servant quarters. "By placing them in this way I created a tension between the buildings," explains Gujral. In the middle is a landscaped courtyard, what Dr.R S Sodhi, an eminent planner and expert on large complex designs, calls the *veda* , the *baramda*, or a cul de sac that epitomizes the north Indian village.

In fact, the complex has a rather late Mughal feel to it. Originally the jury that awarded the project had felt that this Indianness was a drawback and that the Embassy should reflect the character of Belgium. But the Premier intervened and said that for him this was a qualification. Commenting on the influence of globalization on architectural practice, Gujral says "modern architecture is built for nowhere and speaks of nowhere. But building is like a human being – it has its own identity and provides an identity to its inhabitants." According to Arjun Thapar, an architect who teaches at the School of Planning and Architecture "The Embassy is not a pure building rather is architecture that reflects an artist's thinking and personality."

"When I sat down to design it, it was like I paint, without conscious thought that I want it to be like this or that- emotion finds its style. I introduced a sculptural element that was natural with my background. Where I used conscious thought was in the planning," says Satish Gujral.

Sodhi concurs "the Belgian Embassy is a sculptural form,

specially from the outside. Moving inside is like moving through sculptured space." Herein lies the problem. " Probably after having conceived of the form, Gujral didn't want to compromise with it and was therefore not able to plan the openings, windows and doors, " he clarifies adding " we architects feel that form of the building should emerge form the foundations and function rather then vice versa."

Gujral however feels that "professionals always abuse the non-professionals, and talk about techniques. It is only in the modern times that the divorce between architecture, sculpture and painting has taken place."

"Visiting the Belgian Embassy is like visiting as museum. It is not like a regular office space." Unlike other embassy structures in the Diplomatic Enclave, this is not cold and intimidating. "It is like an oasis amongst many other ugly and hostile structures. Open, friendly and non-intimidating," says Thapar.

Placing it in context of history of design Thapar feels that it made architectural history, in the manner it broke norms of office buildings. Sodhi agrees and says that it was probably the first time that exposed bricks were used for a formal building, bricks were usually considered and informal medium. The use of exposed bricks however was not new, considered that Le Corbusier had built almost the entire Chandigarh with this look. Bricks are also problem material because they allow for leakage unless until the roofing has been properly treated, especially in context of the Embassy the wall merges into the roof shaped like a dome, explains Sodhi.

The designer remarks that "in the 15 years of its existence its importance has grown around the world." The best encomium for the Belgain Embassy is proabably provided by Gujral himself, "If Michaelanglo's Sistine Chapel could survive for so many centuries, why the Belgian Embassy would not."