

The personal is the political



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Artist Parag Tandel's art uses man-made resin to make a strong case for environmental protection

The thing about consuming television and the Internet is that we are constantly enveloped by the major miseries of the world. Yet another species is erased, a landslide kills dozens, a drought parches hundreds — this is de rigueur for the daily news, disasters hurtling towards us at warp speed. Many of us are lucky enough to remain unaffected by these disasters. We do not see ourselves as agents of change, we shake our heads and we turn back into our busy lives. We are disconnected from it all.

This is why we need art like Parag Tandel's. His work helps gently shift the contours of our mind and situate us closer to the steady erosion of our habitat. In his third solo exhibition, *Chronicle*, Tandel shows us a sea change in the marinescape that he grew up with. His sea creatures are real and imagined, and hark back to a mystical, fable-like past.

"I grew up listening to stories from mom, dad, granny or people around me in Chendani Koliwada (Thane)," he reminisces. "They would talk about the way the creek used to be. There were lots of fish, including some species like mudskipper which are not found any more. 'Yeda masa' (dolphins) used to visit. The water was clear and earlier, there was lots of sand."

Changing landscapes

Tandel's luscious sculptures draw on his Koli heritage and evoke ideas of ecology and migration.

“We ‘Kolis’, who are now residents of Thane, migrated five-six centuries ago from Ratnagiri — which is interesting, because though we are migrants ourselves, we are now called natives... But in recent years Thane has become a hub for construction activity around the creeks and mangroves forests. It is well known for its fresh water lakes, but now these lakes are also being claimed by builders and slow construction activity is on; so lots of natural habitat is being used for construction of concrete structures,” Tandel laments.

Making a point

The colours he uses in his art — muddy browns, deep greens, delicate lilac — reflect this pollution, colours that he sees as discharged by effluents in water bodies as industrial waste.

'Even the material he uses to craft his sculptures makes a strong point: it is manmade resin that is made from polymers, a polluting substance.

“I purposely used man-made products with which the process of making is very harmful to nature. So here, I’m essentially reversing the natural order by making natural forms with a material which has polluted habitats.”

For Tandel, the personal is the political. But it is how he uses these tropes to explore the many facets of the human-nature conflict that makes his work moving and layered.

Between the lush colours, the compelling tactility of his creations and the overlaid message, Tandel’s Chronicle is an exhibition for our times.

Chronicle will be on show till September 11 at Tarq, Colaba