

Scroll.in

ART WORLD

Half Naked Nude: An Indian artist seeks sensuality in debris on the beach and in household objects

Shahid Datawala makes art out of everyday things.

by *Zinnia Ray Chaudhuri*

Published Jul 03, 2017 · 03:30 pm



Pinsqueezer. Image by Shahid Datawala. Courtesy: Tarq.

It was an overcast day at the beach near Vaitarna, Thane, and artist-photographer Shahid Datawala had ventured out for a walk with his friend Joy Datta. At the beach, Datawala and Datta were surrounded by the washed up debris of discarded things, caught in sand that was choked by a recent oil-spill. Instead of garbage, Datawala says he saw intriguing shapes and sensuous forms.

He returned the next day with his camera to capture these shapes, half embedded in earth but peeking out in shades of blue and yellow. "It was pouring while I was taking the pictures, with Joy holding the umbrella over my head to protect my camera," said Datawala. After six hours of taking photographs in torrential rain, Datawala knew he had all the material he needed for a show.

He calls this series of images *Half Naked Nude*.





Image by Shahid Datawala. Courtesy: Tarq.

The series along with another project done by Datawala, titled *Unstill Life*, will be on display for the first time at the Tarq art gallery in Mumbai from July 6 to August 5. The show, says Datawala, will be dedicated to Datta, for it was the late fashion photographer who took him to the beach on that rainy day.

“He knew me and my style of work very well and he knew that this sort of aesthetic would be right up my alley,” said Datawala. Datta died in a car accident in October 2016.

Datawala never felt the need to visit other beaches for *Half Naked Nude*. “I could have gone on shooting, but I knew I had everything I wanted to show in those pictures. We, as artists, feel that we have to justify our work by how long we have been working on it, but when you know you just know.”





Image by Shahid Datawala. Courtesy: Tarq.

The found objects along the beach remain unaltered in Datawala's images and betray his fascination with the human body. A bright piece of plastic, buried in the sand, appears to approximate the curves of a woman's body.

"I think it is important to take a minute and really understand your object or your subject," said Datawala. "Like, during my fashion shoots, I'm very aware of every inch of the human body. I think while photographing anything you need to take that time."

While *Half Naked Nude* celebrates the hidden art in found objects, his other series of work has been created from random things in his house that Datawala describes as a "mini-museum with its collections of scissors, typewriters and keys". The photographs are the result of subconscious fiddling with these items. "The two bodies of work have two completely different visual languages – one is what I found and the other is what I already owned and gave another representation, but they are all bound together by the fact that they have ceased to serve their original purpose."





Cargear. Image by Shahid Datawala. Courtesy Tarq.

Datawala dons many hats in his life: he is a fashion photographer and a designer of jewellery, clothes and furniture. His philosophy at its essence is unpretentious: everything is art.

“Everything is art and design and is meant to serve a physical or mental or visual function. All of it inspires some emotion,” said Datawala, who has been known to create jewellery inspired by the Bombay sewage system.

The first composition for *Unstill Life* came to him while playing around with a toy car. “I started stacking metal car gears under and over a blue toy car – just trying to balance it perfectly so that the whole thing doesn’t topple over.” The creation, called *Cargear*, became the first of many more to be made over the next few months. Most of the images in *Unstill Life* will leave the audience queasy – 50 pins pushed into a lemon sitting within a lemon squeezer or a telephone cord extending from a stuffed squirrel balancing a vintage, bulky phone receiver on its head.



Telefish. Image by Shahid Datawala. Courtesy: Tarq.

"I would ask my friends and their kids to bring their toys or weird things when they would come to my house and some of those things have made their way into *Unstill Life*, like a friend's 14-year-old son brought his panda bear toy from his childhood days and it's in the show with the end of a little bulb as its mouth," said Datawala.

The theme that runs through most of Datawala's work, is that his constant goal is to give these found objects a new life. Ever since artist Marcel Duchamp's installation, *Fountain* (1917), creating with found objects has become an art form. Duchamp's *Fountain* was a urinal that was simply turned over, which has since been interpreted as the image of a seated Buddha, something erotic or even a practical joke. But, Duchamp had once described his intent to simply shift the focus in art from the physical to intellectual.

"While shooting *Half Naked Nude*, I was trying to see the objects strewn around the beach as remains of people, moments, travel, memories rather than just bits of plastic and fabric. *Unstill Life* to me is like tinkering with household things and seeing a visual emerge like a surrealist illustration of a surrealist narratives made up in my own head."





Image by Shahid Datawala. Courtesy: Tarq.