



(Clockwise from below) Untitled by Aaditi Joshi Ashish Chandra, Courtesy: Tarq; Father's House by Kaushik Mukhopadhyay Courtesy of the artist, Tarq and Chatterjee and Lal; Untitled by Prashant Pandey Courtesy of the artist and Maskara Gallery



Reused and Reborn

An ongoing group exhibition in Mumbai questions the nature of waste and whether discarded objects can ever be given new dignity

POOJA PILLAI

WASTE, LIKE death, is inevitable. As curator Birgid Uccia writes in her note about the ongoing group exhibition 'Waste Land' at Tarq in Mumbai. "Even an ideal society shall always generate remains as a *sine qua non* of the cycle of production and consumption. "It's this thought that is likely to haunt the visitor, as she makes her way through the two floors of the Colaba gallery and one that, perhaps, is most strongly felt when looking at the 18 feet high sculpture made by Aaditi Joshi. The Mumbai-based artist has created this site-specific work manipulating the shape and texture of that most ubiquitous of waste materials — plastic bags. This is art that has resonance in Mumbai, particularly at a time when the municipal body has sought to enforce, with mixed success, a ban on plastic and the question, perhaps, that the visitor asks herself is this: If art can emerge even from something as reviled as the plastic bag, at what point does waste fully become just waste and not the raw material for another object?"

It's a difficult question to answer, but it's one that is worth keeping in mind while viewing the exhibition and not because of anything but that the participating artists, each in her or his own way, has managed to subvert the idea of "waste" material. Take, for instance, Prashant Pandey's sculpture *Universe*, which hangs against one wall of the upper floor of the gallery. It seems composed of soft-hued flowers, but a close examination reveals that these are in fact cigarette butts, collected by the artist and meticulously peeled open to reveal a hitherto unsuspected beauty. Could it be then, one wonders, that there is something good to be found in the trash bin? In the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, Uccia notes that Vincent Van Gogh once described the garbage dump as an "artist's paradise" and in 'Waste Land', one can see why, whether it is in the ragged, intricate beauty of Boshudhara Mukherjee's wall hanging woven out of different waste materials or the whimsy that guides the construction of Kaushik Mukhopadhyay's kinetic sculptures, which are made by re-purposing old electronic items.

The exhibition, which also includes works by Asim Waqif, Kaushik Saha and Tanya Goel, has been conceived as a part

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of the biennial public diplomacy campaign '70 Years of Swiss-Indian Friendship: Connecting Minds - Inspiring the Future' by the Consulate General of Switzerland in Mumbai. In an email, Uccia explains, "I was always interested in the fact that the moment of transition of an object, from being useful into the stage of disuse, differs from culture to culture. In Switzerland waste is almost invisible, due to high technologies that counteract the fallouts of our wasteful society. By contrast, India is more versatile when it comes to dealing with meager resources, extending the life of a material far beyond the widely accepted limits in the West."

So when the Consulate General of Switzerland contacted Uccia to create a show that would address aspects of both cultures, Uccia realised that the subject of 'waste' was one that would resonate, regardless of the two societies' different approaches to the concept. She says, "Since the beginning of cultural history, waste has been an integral part of the functioning of socio-economic systems. However, artists remind us that due to the ecological impact of unsustainable technologies, aggressive urbanisation and consumerist behavior, we face an unprecedented quantity of waste today. By recognising waste as an artistic raw material, they not only transform the ambivalent relationship society has with waste, they also alter the process of deterioration by reversing it, reassigning value and meaning to something that has been discarded."

'Waste Land' is on at TARQ, Mumbai till August 5