

This new exhibition sees waste through a different lens

Heidi Volpe | July 23, 2018

Bringing new life into discarded objects



Image: Untitled by Aaditi Joshi (2018); fused plastic bags, acrylic colour and wood

What is old is new, what has been discarded is rescued and reassembled, resurfacing as something beautiful, something with message and purpose: A new exhibit at the TARQ gallery focuses on one of the most pertinent issues for our planet—waste—and forces us to look at it through a different lens.

Seven Indian **artists** who specialise in waste as raw material were selected by curator and art historian Birgid Uccia, who poses the question “Is waste a resource or a problem?”, through the showcase, *Waste Land*, which is part of the biennial public diplomacy campaign “70 Years of Swiss-Indian Friendship: Connecting Minds - Inspiring the Future” of the Consulate General of Switzerland in Mumbai. Uccia is both principal and founder at Asian Contemporary Fine Arts, and has more than 20 years of insight into the international art arena as curator and art advisor.

The seven artists she featured in the exhibition challenge the hierarchies of accepted materials in the field of art, as well as the norms of refined taste. She’s keenly aware of waste production as a resource, looking at that moment of transition of an object from being useful into the stage of disuse and how it differs from culture to culture.

Uccia notes, “It was important to highlight that through the process of artistic transformation, the works on display do not reveal their origin in the dumpsite or the everyday context of usage. In addition, there are several artists in the exhibition who reuse their own materials or even recycle their own ideas, shedding light on the fact that ‘everything is potentially waste’.”

In **Switzerland**, her home country, she believes waste is invisible, thus Swiss artists aren’t really challenged by the idea of it. In contrast, says Uccia, “India is more versatile and creative when it comes to dealing with meagre resources, extending the life of a material far beyond the widely accepted limits

in the West. It has always struck me how Indian artists insert waste into the cycle of cultural production, even though large parts of Indian society still consider waste as ritually and hygienically impure, evoking disgust and repression. I saw similarities in the field of art and the recycling industry. In both fields, waste is used as a resource and raw material, altering the process of deterioration by reversing it. The creation of aesthetic objects from discarded materials reassigns value to something that has been doomed to oblivion. The same happens in the recycling industry, where waste is turned into a commodity that enters a new value chain.”

She’s keenly aware of waste production as a problem. Waste production is expected reach approximately 27 billion tonnes per year by 2050, one-third coming from Asia, with the biggest culprits being **China** and **India**. Waste generation in metropolitan areas of India will be 0.7 kg per person per day in 2025, according to the United Nation Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

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Untitled by Aaditi Joshi (2018); fused plastic bags, acrylic colour and wood
Image: TARQ

*The exhibit is on display at **TARQ** until August 4*

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