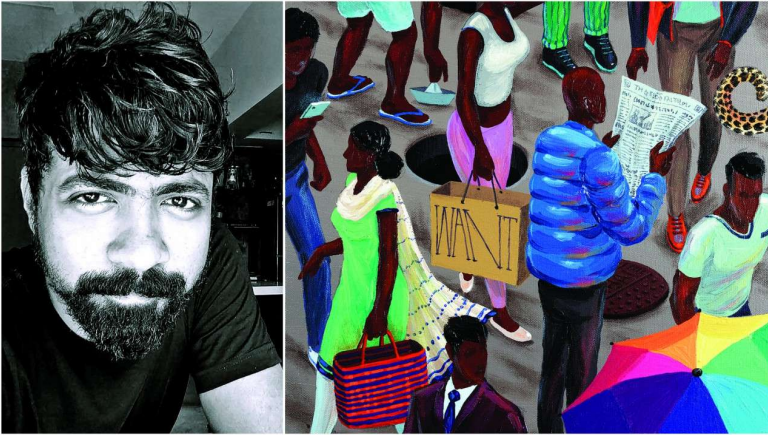


City tales

WRITTEN BY

Rinky Kumar



Sameer Kulavoor artwork Sameer Kulavoor; (Right) Series 3 (Part of a set of six); Acrylic on canvas; 15 x 15 inches; 2017

Tons of thousands of people go about the daily rigmarole of their lives in the bustling metropolis of Mumbai. Each of them carries a unique story within them and is striving to win his or her battles. This forms the basis of graphic designer, illustrator and artist Sameer Kulavoor's solo exhibition, *A Man of the Crowd*, which is currently on display at TARQ, an art gallery in Colaba. Based on the title of a story by the famous American author Edgar Allan Poe, it comprises a series of works set against the backdrop of graphic, grey, surfaces which come alive with faceless human figures that are rendered in contrasting, eye-popping fluorescent hues. The exhibition also has a series of terracotta figurines that serve as three-dimensional extensions of the paintings.

The 35-year-old artist says, "This series is a visceral response to everything that I've felt, seen and experienced in the last couple of years. The works have been informed directly or indirectly by elements from my surroundings, travels, everyday occurrences and tragedies, memories, news, social media noise, friends and family (and self in some cases)" He elaborates that it is a take on contemporary urban life. "The impact of politics, economy, idea of development and smart cities – themes I have been dealing with over the last two years – have found their way into these works. It's about a feeling of disillusionment, insignificance, futility and skeptical optimism about life in a metropolis," he adds.

Kulavoor, whose work lies at the intersection of contemporary illustration, graphic design and art, has attempted a lot of new things in this show. "Some of the important themes in this series were density, scale, friction, space and their relationships with each other in the context of the metropolis," he states. This led him to work on a range of canvas sizes from 4 inches X 4 inches to 4 feet X 4 feet. "I've also explored varying viewpoints and angles – zooming in/zooming out – 'distant birds eye views' to 'up-close (in your face) views' which required me to work in clusters or sets. There are eight such clusters and more than 50 individual works in all. Having said that, I think the entire exhibit feels like a single installation (one cohesive experience) because of the nature of the works. I have also created sculptures in terracotta and concrete as an extension to this series," he elaborates.

Kulavoor, who is the founder of Bombay Duck Designs and co-founder and co-curator of 100%ZINE (a visual arts magazine), has done a lot of illustrations, graphic design and art that feature human figures in urban areas. He has been creating a personal body of work, and self-publishing art books and zines that take a look at characteristic mannerisms and archetypal facets of contemporary surroundings, design and culture. Talking about his fascination for the subject, the Mumbai resident says, "It comes naturally to me. I see the metropolis as a source of endless inspiration and possibilities."

He admits that painting is a primal and personal act. "I painted for long spans of the day and it felt effortless. Besides that, space is a luxury in the city and I had to make do by working in my small-ish studio space in Mazgaon. But I developed a lot of patience. It was a different kind of immersive process," he signs off.