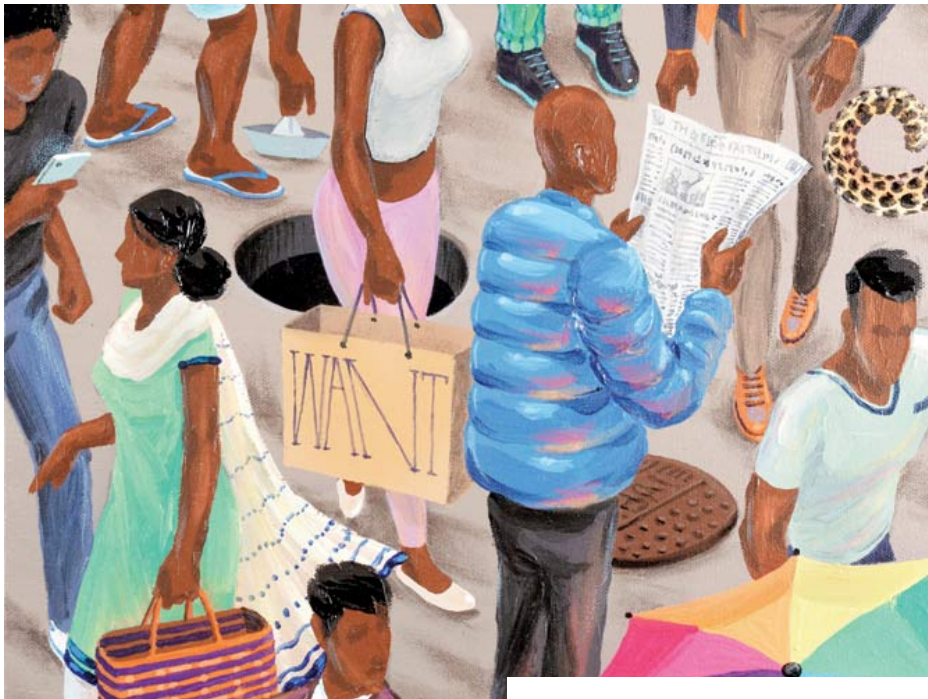


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What You Get With Sameer Kulavoor's Paintings

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In his debut solo exhibition of paintings, Sameer Kulavoor stays true to his concerns as he people-watches Mumbai



There is no road wider in Mumbai than the one you will find on Sameer Kulavoor's canvases. Kulavoor is a name that is widely-regarded in the graphic design and indie publishing communities in the country. To his credit, there is his firm Bombay Duck Designs; his commercial design work, notably for NH7 Weekender; and books and zines, such as *BLUED* (2013), in which he paid homage to the blue tarp that the city protects itself with in the rains. His recent exhibitions include his first solo of monochrome drawings in 2016, and an installation of "fishy" perfumes for last year's Sassoon Dock Art Project.



All this is to say that we have been curious to see what the versatile Kulavoor would bring with his first formal foray into paintings at Tarq, Colaba. A Man of the Crowd continues his preoccupations - engagement with the urban landscape, attention to posture and gesture, vivid detailing of the city's people and paraphernalia. The exhibition is a series of large and small format acrylic-on-canvas paintings, and also terracotta figurines on concrete base. In these, the city's diverse spaces - homes, schools, traffic signals, parks - have disappeared. However, on this endless grey street, faceless but familiar figures play out their many lives and fantasies, as they would in the spaces they inhabit. There are the labourers who haul a metal grill, and, ahead of them, two suit-clad men who chat, ahead of cracking a business deal, perhaps. A policeman searches a man, a woman lingers in a spray of bubbles, a footballer kicks an absentee ball.

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Under Kulavoor's observation, the city is dissected, and the concrete canvas is crowded. Even so, it would seem that its many people, across class, gender and age, have found their own private bubble. Several folks also take selfies in these private cocoons, an act that has increasingly become the primary urban preoccupation.

Urbanscapes and the condition of existing in the city, which inevitably bring out the most primal and profound questions of the self and interpersonal relations, are subjects that we have encountered in the works of Bhupen Khakhar and Sudhir Patwardhan (Kulavoor has spoken about how he has been influenced by Patwardhan). The border between interior and exterior, self and other are porous in their works.

In Kulavoor's series, documentation seems to replace introspection, as he ably plays voyeur. The paintings may invite you to gaze for long, imagining a back story to each character. However, there's a chance that this semi-ethnographic splay of urban lives, might cause a visual fatigue after a point. And, if Kulavoor intends on using fluorescent colours as a signature, he will need to find more innovative ways to rescue that palette from its over-commercialised use, à la graphic design prints. But, you may easily recover from these under Kulavoor's antidote - his genial and intimate understanding of the city and its many moods.