



SHOWCASE

25 Apr 2018

CQ Interviews: Sameer Kulavoor's "A Man of the Crowd" spotlights the heart of a city – its people

It is easy to get lost in the exhibition "A Man of the Crowd" by Sameer Kulavoor. His produced world has done away with architecture, signals or landmarks while prioritising everyday people. Each character seems familiar and expresses a sense of motion almost like they have a destination in mind. The more you look the more you see with this series.

The "A Man of the Crowd" exhibition pulls you into the series in subtly yet effectively. Small details assert themselves to the viewer encouraging them to envision and get invested in a story for each character. Since all the characters engage with a concrete grey background, many of them can be interpreted without socio-economic indicators (that often come with architecture, location and symbolism). Even with the the contextless grey background, there seems to be no question that this is in fact a metropolis, strengthening the notion that what truly makes a city, is its people. CQ had a conversation with [Sameer](#) to understand the thought process behind this series.

What was the thought or original concept that started this series?

Directly or indirectly, my surroundings and everyday occurrences/tragedies as well as memory, news, social media, friends and family (and self, in some cases) inform "A Man of the Crowd". A take on contemporary urban life by creating landscapes that explore scale, density, friction, relationships. The impact of politics, economy, idea of development and smart cities - themes I have been dealing with over the last 2 years - have found their way into these works. A feeling of disillusionment, insignificance, futility, helplessness and skeptical optimism with life in a metropolis, "A Man of the Crowd" had larger issues behind it which resulted in me devoting myself to painting full-time. With the views (from buildings) that I have been exposed to, living in a metropolis all my life may have influenced the decision to paint in a certain manner.

The grey background almost acts as its own understated but constant personality. The other characters engage with it in different ways (removing a block of it, sleeping on it, dropping things on it) yet it provides no context of its own to those other characters. What effect do you think it has on the images and overall series?

Concrete is omnipresent and an inseparable part of the metropolis. It creates a strange familiar-warm-uncomfortable feeling in my gut. I have consciously omitted signs of architecture, signage or location and instead used grey concrete in varying tones (varying times of the day, light, quality of air) to symbolise the city where everything plays out. Beyond creating an aesthetically pleasing effect, I intended reflecting the 'mood' of a metropolis - the presence of greys and the sense of heaviness in the air. But in hindsight it performed well as a neutral backdrop for the other colours to play out.

Apart from the concrete grey, what lead you to use such a vibrant colour palette? In addition to some muted and more typical colours, lot of the characters wore very bright and bold neon shades. Was this a conscious decision?

Deploying fluorescent colours are a recent phenomenon - be it in fabrics or objects. For example, the fluoro orange traffic cones that were used as the metropolis roadlines became more complex. Fluorescent shades are used for infrastructure workers' uniforms so that they can be easily spotted and identified in high density areas. Bright shades are also used in sportswear and accessories for a definite purpose. In most cases the use of colours in a metropolis is functional - to ease the working of a city. I was conscious of this use of colour in context of the metropolis. The use of colours in "A Man of the Crowd" beyond aesthetics is also to understand and decode the workings of the metropolis.

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GALLERY VIEW

`A Man of the Crowd`, at TARQ Gallery



these paintings as daily diaries, including stories I might have seen around me, or from memory, or people/news I catch from social media. I never had a complete painting in mind before I began, instead I worked on them daily, figure by figure and they slowly populated the works. This process was therapeutic and meditative in some way.

Apart from your everyday characters doing familiar things, your version of public metropolitan spaces includes a tiger, leopard, robot, a miniature sized man, etc. Why were they introduced in this series?

Animals are part of the metropolis' story – whether you choose to see them or not. Spaces that were once inhabited only by animals have now transformed into metropolises. Some exist at the edges of cities as traces of the past. Some are still present. And some have become symbols of politics/political parties. Robots, miniature sized men, inflatable characters - imaginary metaphors doing imaginary things.

“I wanted to extend the works as sculptures and I had this idea of putting common people (like the ones in the paintings) on a pedestal (almost like comic action figures).”

How did you decide on the layout within the gallery? Does the arrangement or presentation follow any particular rationale?

Hena Kapadia (Gallery Founder/Curator, [Tarq](#)) and I had some ideas on how we wanted the audience to perceive the show. For example, the sculptures/figurines were arranged as a modular cluster to give them sense of being an extension of the paintings. There were few small-sized paintings that revolved around the idea of 'protest'. Hena suggested we have them displayed together on one section of a wall as a cluster and so on.

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SERIES 2 - D
Acrylic on Canvas



SERIES 8 - E
Acrylic and terracotta on a concrete base

we have to play as inhabitants of the metropolis. For example, one may be a mother at home and also a corporate boss with a large team or a therapist/agony aunt for that friend under stress or a teacher/coach with the kids. We keep switching roles because the city is so demanding. The other set 3 (where the figures seem to decrease) was created after the Elphinstone stampede that occurred on 29th september 2017 - the intent was to achieve a sense of claustrophobic density but not a literal depiction of the stampede.

Why was sculpture introduced as an extension of the series and what do you think it contributes?

I wanted to extend the works as sculptures. I had this idea of putting common people (like the ones in the paintings) on a pedestal (almost like comic action figures). I decided to work with terracotta to create the sculptures because of its tactile and fragile nature, placed on concrete pedestals. Like I said, concrete creates a very familiar warm uncomfortable feeling in my gut.

Sameer's work occupies a space that includes illustration, graphic design and art. To discover more of his work, click [here](#).



SERIES 8 - H

Acrylic and terracotta on a concrete base

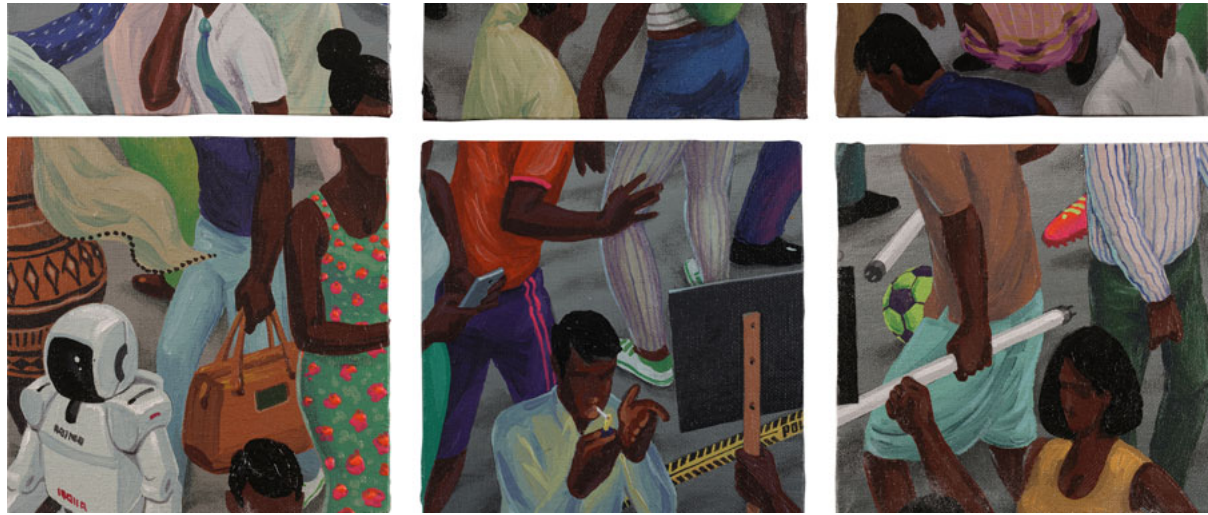


SERIES 3 (SET OF 6)

Acrylic on Canvas. Series 3 was created after the Elphinstone stampede that occurred on 29th September 2017 - the intent was to achieve a sense of claustrophobic density

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SERIES 6 (PART OF A SET OF SIX)

Acrylic on Canvas. Series 6 is about the idea of multiple roles we have to play as inhabitants of the metropolis.



SERIES 5 - C AND SERIES 5 - G

Acrylic on Canvas



GALLERY VIEW

`A Man of the Crowd`, at TARQ Gallery

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