

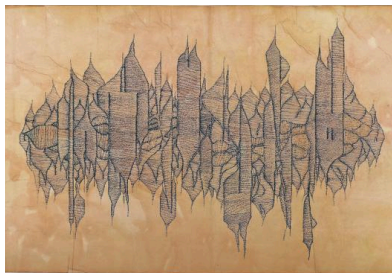
# Thresholds of creativity

Savia Mahajan's first solo show is about transition, malleability of material and willingness to experiment

By RINKY KUMAR

Concepts of life and death and everything that lies in between have been the subject of many discussions in religious texts, science as well as philosophy. For Mumbai-based artist Savia Mahajan, the quest to find answers to these notions prompted her to relinquish her practice as a painter and embark on a new journey of self-discovery. This forms the premise of her first solo exhibition, *Liminal*, currently underway at Tarq. Through a series of sculptures, installations and drawings made with ceramic, paper and clay created over four years, Mahajan explores the concept of impermanence.

The idea for these works germinated almost a decade ago when Mahajan gave up painting and was drawn towards the medium of ceramic. She says, "When I used to paint, my subjects were tribal, surreal and inspired by nature. I was constantly on an existential quest, striving to find the meaning



**Disorientation:** The common theme is liminality ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

of the philosophy of life and understand why does one exist? After painting for 10-12 years, I felt disconnected with my creations."

This set Mahajan on a quest for a material that suited her thought process. Her hunt was over after seven years when she found clay and realised that it was malleable enough to complement her work philosophy. "Clay as a material is paradoxical as it's a symbol of

strength and fragility. An everyday object like a teacup can perish and break but one of the oldest civilisations and excavations led man on the hunt for clay and terracotta. I realised there was no end to understanding this medium. My experimentations and failures along with the material brought me to a juncture where I found what I was seeking and that's how I made the transition," says the artist.

Mahajan reveals that the common theme through her solo show is the concept of liminality (that which relates to a transitional or an initial stage of a process). She says, "It's sublime and not as stark, direct or bold as life or death. Between life and death there are thresholds which are defined through this phenomenon." Mahajan explains that the liminal state is what you go through between sleeping and being awake, between freezing and thawing. "It has a beautiful as well as destructive equality to it. It also explores the concept of impermanence, how many

beginnings and endings does a life form have to take, is death really the end or is there life beyond death?" she asks.

Mahajan has explored this concept through cobalt, iron oxide and gold and created a multitude of objects, ranging from fossils to books, a series of shape-shifting objects and even intricate drawings on recycled paper. "I have taken actual books, rebound them, smeared them with clay before firing them at a high temperature of 1200 degree Celsius. At 100 degrees, the original book completely burns out but leaves behind its traces. So does the material really die?" she questions. Mahajan has used folded paper, to give the work dimension and a feeling of disjointedness. Using the extract of pomegranate skin infused with tea to give it a worn out look she has tried to age one of the books. She adds that all the materials are sym-



bolic and their usage fits in well with the concept of impermanence. "Gold is not classical in ceramic usage but since I'm self-taught I was attracted towards natural material. I have used cobalt and ash

which has given me particular tones and colours. Rust is a symbol of degeneration, a slow process that is happening around us," she shares.

Mahajan reveals working on the show has taught several things about herself. "Understanding the nature of clay and how its temperature changes according to the climate were the biggest challenges. One needs to have reverence towards it as it reveals itself slowly. It's a material that crushes your ego. Initially, there are pieces that just [broke] and out of 100 such failures, you get one success. Through such experiences, I learnt that you can go on with multiple failures in life but you need to keep moving ahead with your willpower to succeed. The material tested my patience and will power [but] it also taught me an important lesson of life," she emphasises.

*Liminal is ongoing at Tarq, Colaba until September 9*