



Sameer Kulavoor's paintings depict large-scale, bustling metropolises

The Mumbai-based artist talks us through his geometric works, rooted on the grounds of politics and socio-economic experiences.

Words Ayla Angelos

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The portfolio of Mumbai-based artist Sameer Kulavoor is replete with large-scale, geometric metropolises – the type of work that gives a gentle nod to Picasso’s cubism for the ways in which it contrasts reality with painting. Within these pieces, you’ll find buildings, city streets and the people that occupy them composed in a myriad of mediums, all of which explore the impact of time, culture, politics and socio-economic conditions on our surroundings.

Sameer’s reasoning behind choosing a subject matter like this – and thus the reason why he approaches it in such a busy, chaotic and detailed manner – can be linked right back to his childhood. His earliest memory of the arts is at the age of six or seven; he had a neighbour called Sujatha Bangera, an art teacher at school in suburban Mumbai. “I vividly remember being fascinated by her sketchbooks and landscape paintings and drawings,” he tells *It’s Nice That*. “She was kind enough to occasionally give me demos and encourage me. She was around for a few months and then she moved – and she gave me a diary as a parting gift and asked me to draw, paint and fill it up. I did that and never stopped.”

What’s more is that Sameer’s parents had an inter-religious love marriage (Hindu and Muslim) in the late-70s. Born in 1983 to fairly progressive parents that treated people from all communities as equal – “grateful to my parents for this” – he would be taken to churches, mosques and temples. As such, Sameer grew up an atheist yet these experiences shaped him wholly, particularly in terms of developing empathy and understanding humanity. Then, in the early 90s, India went through economic reforms and liberalisation. “That caused a lot of changes in my immediate surroundings in suburban Mumbai. One could see new roads and infrastructure projects being developed, real estate boom, foreign brands coming in, exposure to

global music and pop culture, aspirations and lifestyle changes in the urban middle class – all in a matter of a few years.” As Sameer was still young at this time, he wasn’t able to fully understand why these changes were happening but knew they were momentous, or “striking” as he puts it. A few years down the line and he now has a grasp on these changes, which have inadvertently shaped his work in many ways.



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Sameer Kulavoor: Viral Content. (Copyright © Sameer Kulavoor, 2020)

“Over the years, I have felt that most of the work I do comes from the idea of a ‘metropolis’ and what it has to offer,” he says. With a process that’s fuelled by observations and experiences, it’s no wonder that his subject tends to revolve around buildings and city life – the things he sees around him on a daily basis. This becomes crystal clear once the viewer lays eyes on his vast portfolio, where *The Ghoda Cycle Project* depicts an illustrated documentation of the many types of ‘Rhoda’ cycles in rural and urban India. Then there’s *Blued*, another documentation that focuses on the use of tarpaulin, or colloquially known as ‘Taad-Patr’ in India; and *Zeroxwalla* zine, a visual journey through a ‘zerox ki dukaan’, a copy-shop in Mumbai. All of

which denote familiar city scenes and patterns, which are then elevated through drawing and design.

His most recent body of work – that which recently featured in a solo exhibition at TARQ and is titled *You Are All Caught Up* – continues this study into the metropolis and analyses the “personal, political and the pandemic”, all the while characteristically placing the city as the backdrop. Very much a reflection of the current global situation, *The Migrants Have Left*, for example, turns his previously people-focused drawings on its head as it illustrates a life in lockdown. “I started working on a non-representational abstracted ‘soulless’ city – a city that shockingly and cruelly led to an exodus of migrant workers back to their small towns and villages on foot; a result of haphazard planning by the government,” he says, further rooting his work on the grounds of politics and socio-economic experiences.

As Sameer’s work continues to steer into more abstract, graphic territory, the more his conceptual references seem to shine through. Within every structure and every scene filled with city-goers, there lays a specific context that delves into the lands in which he occupies – his muse and tool that he builds upon with paint. “My work comes from my need to create and make,” he concludes on his reasons for working this way, hoping that his audience will search deep into the hidden meanings of his creations. “It is satisfying when through my work, people begin to see their close surroundings and the smaller details in the world more vividly.”

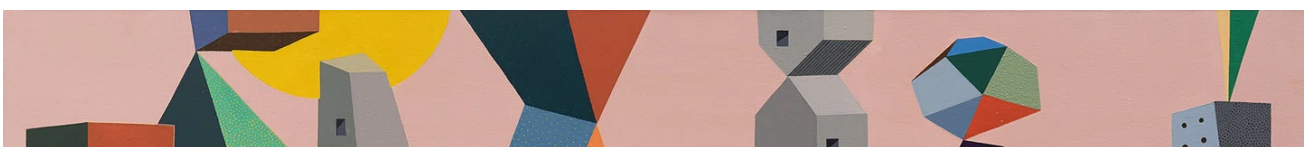




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www.sameerkulavoor.com

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About the Author

Ayla Angelos

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Ayla was an editorial assistant back in June 2017 and has continued to work with us on a freelance basis. She has spent the last seven years as a journalist, and covers a range of topics including photography, art and graphic design. Feel free to contact Ayla with any stories or new creative projects.

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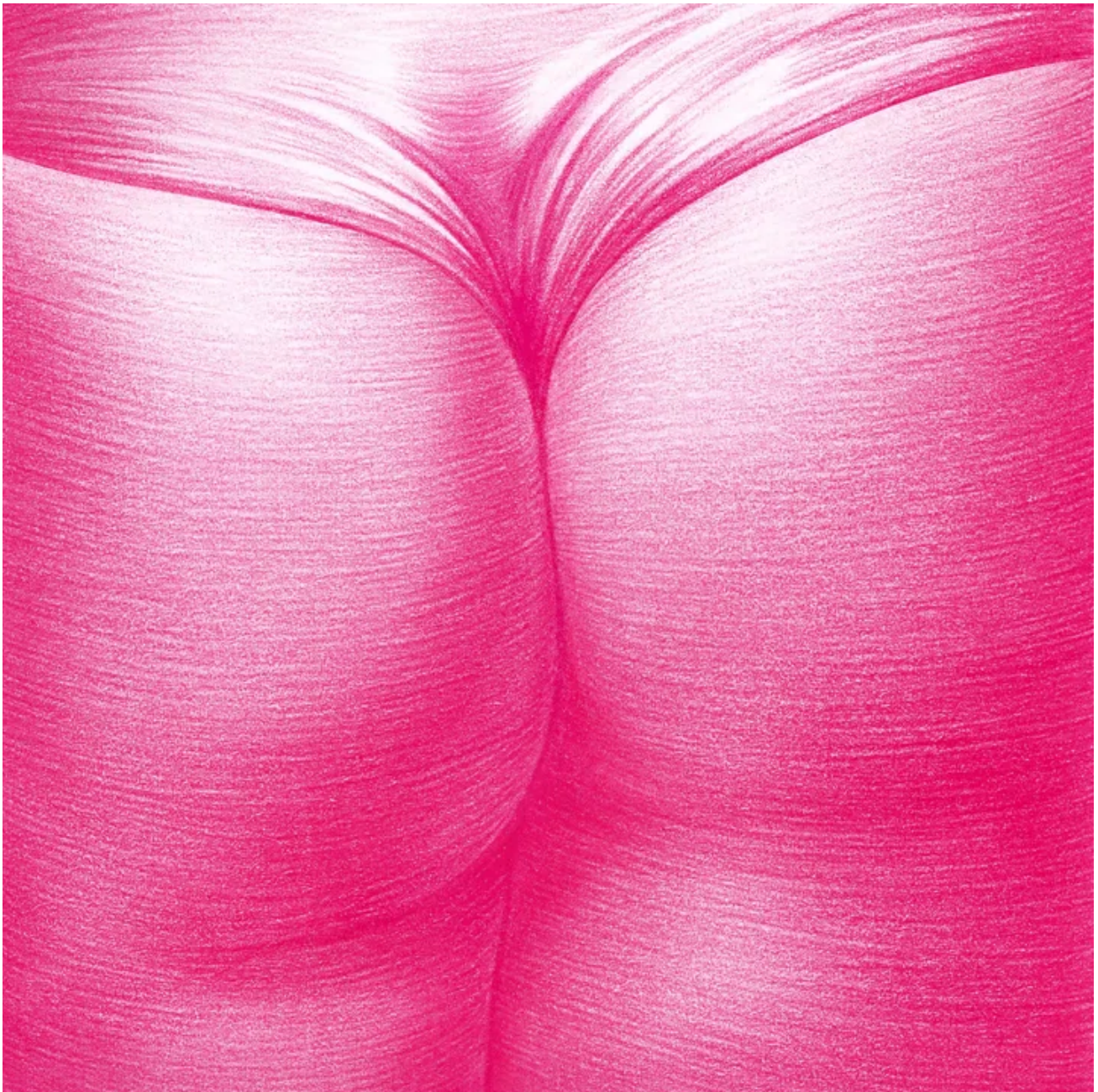


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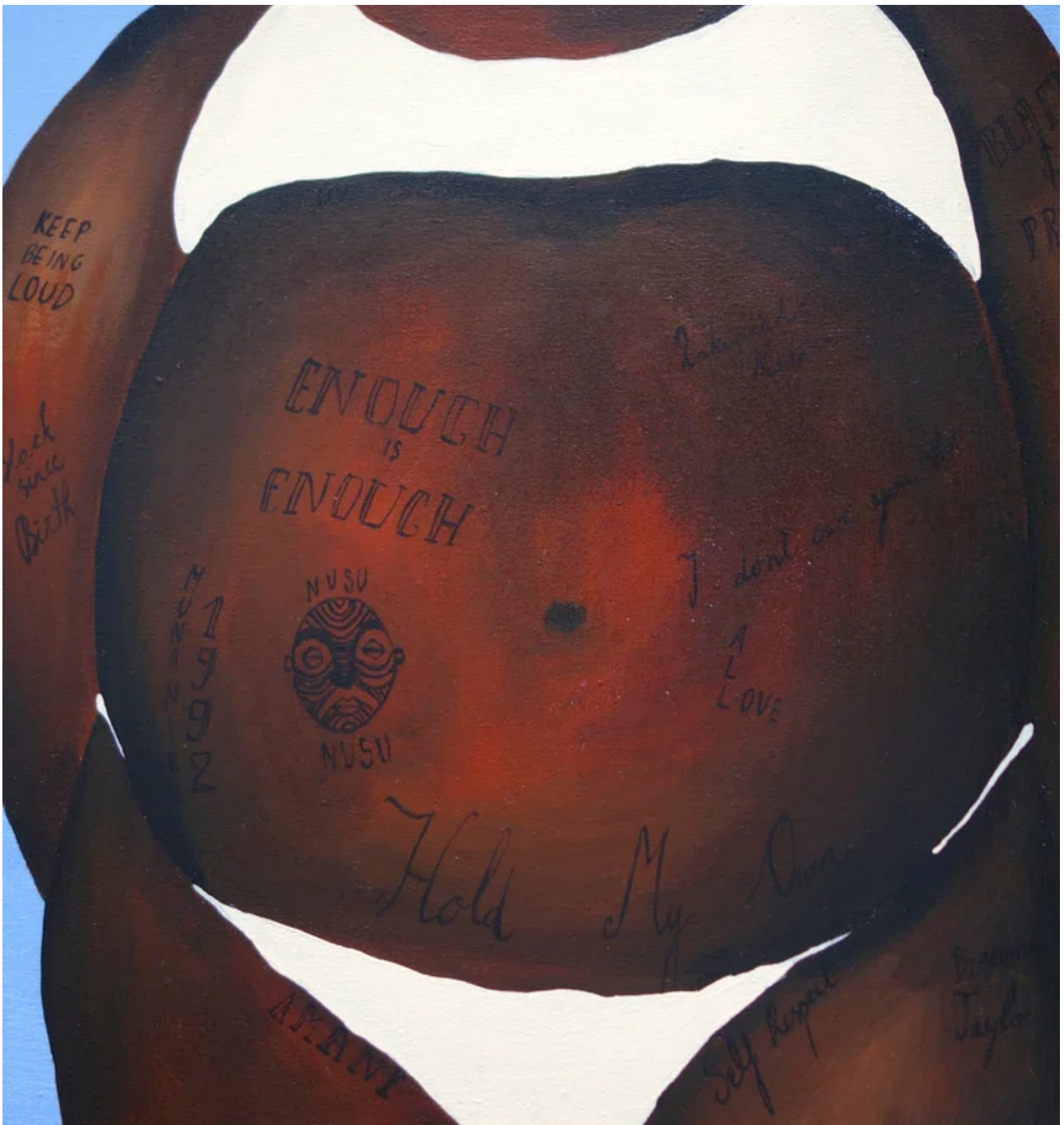


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