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Sameer Kulavoor's new show investigates the way we view the world through a screen

'You Are All Caught Up' features drawings and paintings that trace the impact of social media and information overload on our lives



(left) 'I Like It. What Is It?', acrylic on canvas, 2019; (right) '58', acrylic on canvas, 2019. Photos courtesy: Sameer Kulavoor and TARQ

By **Avantika Bhuyan**

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One of the most striking works at the new show, 'You Are All Caught Up', at Tarq, Mumbai, is *I Like it. What is It?* People from all walks of life can be seen pointing

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failure to capture the fleeting moment will have drastic repercussions. The work is part of artist Sameer Kulavoor's ongoing investigation of the impact of social media and the merging of the personal and political through the ubiquitous blue screen.

According to Hena Kapadia of Tarq, Kulavoor has always been intent on capturing the events taking place around him, and his sense of observation has only become more acute with time. "For me, *I Like it. What is It?* is one of the highlights of the show. It takes its name from a famous limited edition graphic art piece by Anthony Burrill. In fact, the entire exhibition focuses on the way we view the world through a screen," she says.

The show, which is the artist's second solo at the gallery, features a series of paintings and drawings created 2018 onwards. "Setting up the works in the physical space was also challenging in some ways, Hena and I worked together to create a good synergy," says Kulavoor.

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'You Are All Caught Up' features three distinct phases of the artist's practice.

"The first phase began when I realised the amount of time I was spending on my devices. It was alarming. As a response, I felt that I needed to focus my energy on translating those exact thoughts into my work," he says.

His perception of social media underwent a change in 2019 after Article 370 was revoked in Kashmir and the protests around the Citizenship Amendment Act broke out. "Social media then became an important tool for information sharing and even for mobilising or educating people," elaborates Kulavoor. These events inspired some of the works, which are part of the show. And then the outbreak of the pandemic led to an explosion of information and content. "Since the lockdown was announced, I have made some attempt to look away from what was being thrown at me," he adds.

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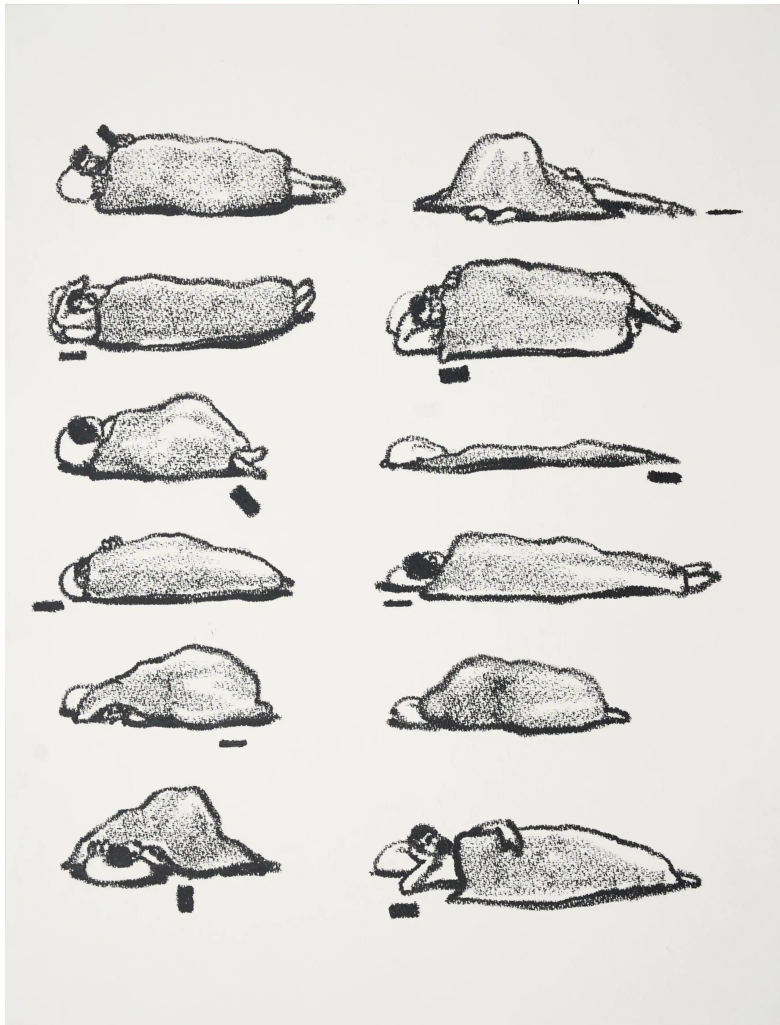
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'Psychosomatic', solid marker on paper, 2020. Photo courtesy: Sameer Kulavoor and TARQ

This tussle between consuming information and shielding oneself from it has resulted in some distinct works. There is *Psychosomatic*, for one, which features a set of drawings. It depicts the restless sleep that follows after a person looks at the screen at night. This work stems from a specific instance during the lockdown. “Everyday a lot of numbers would come about covid-19 cases. Records were being broken either in India or abroad. One night, after having looked at these figures, I felt that I was afflicted with those symptoms,” says Kulavoor. He began to feel feverish, with a heaviness in the chest. His partner then told him about a psychosomatic condition. “Once I read about it and understood it, the symptoms disappeared. I had been creating anxiety for myself after having been exposed to an information overdose,” he adds.

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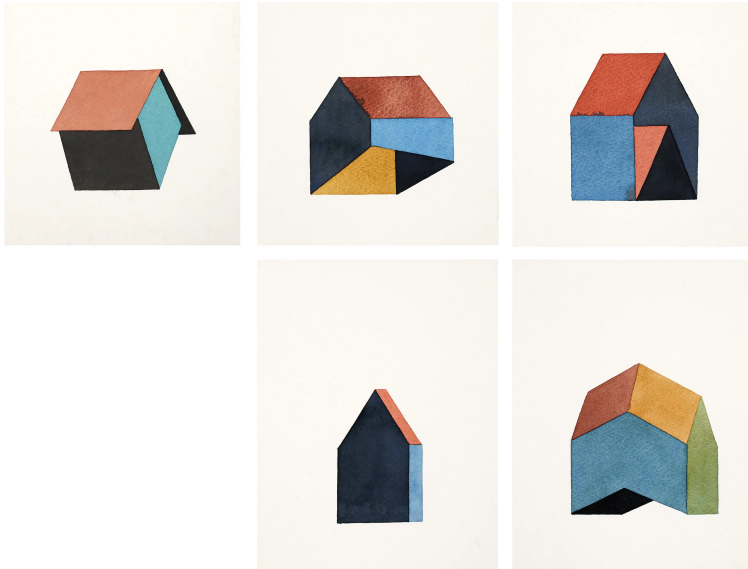
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'Discomfort 5', watercolours on acid-free paper, 2020. Photo courtesy: Sameer Kulavoor and TARQ

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Another series of works, *Discomfort 5*, stem from the marked absences of everyday humdrum in the urban milieu. Kulavoor, who usually likes to be out on the streets to feel inspired, found the sudden emptiness of the city disconcerting. “This led me to explore the moment in a figurative way. In all the work that I did during the lockdown, I wasn’t responding to human figures but to the idea of a dysfunctional city, notions of discomfort and what really is home,” he explains. *Discomfort 5* features drawings of manmade structures that have lost their meanings. “I would find myself staring at a pillar of an empty flyover or a commercial complex bereft of visitors. My work has tried to address this imbalance of the past seven-eight months,” says Kulavoor.

'You Are All Caught Up' can be viewed at Tarq, Mumbai, between 3 December to 7 January

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