

The fab five

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Every now and then you see a work of art that you want to explore: Who is the artist? What else has he done? Where did this artist study and what's on his mind?

The India Art Summit threw at least five such experiences at me: Not only did I enjoy the works of these artists, but I also found myself trying to learn more about them. One of them, luckily, has an ongoing solo show. There were others whose works I enjoyed as well, but these were known artists and didn't offer me the same "ah-ha" moments. So, here are my fab five.

Mayura Subhedar: Shown by The Loft, Mumbai. Subhedar creates these exquisite gems that have video at their core. Two of her works at the summit comprised small cases thickly lined with crimson velvet, and a monitor embedded within. They are intense, sharp — and strangely quotidian. A camera remains trained on her hand, resting on a sheet of paper, as she pierces the spaces around with a sharply pointed pencil in quick, precise hits. Mayura acts out almost a kind of rage that burns through the work. Instead of exploding, she focuses it like a laser. Her repetitive actions lend an abstraction to the works — a loop that mimics the medium she works in. **Prajwal**

Choudhury: Shown by Project 88, Mumbai. Choudhury's installation brilliantly fused the polarity between the artisanal and the mechanical. In one of the most engaging installations of the summit, Choudhury devised an assembly line of sorts, with match boxes moving into a mixer-like vessel. The domestic and the industrial fused together in a glance; an engaging underlying tension that strangely held the work together.

Shanti Swaroopini: Shown by Threshold Gallery, Delhi. She's not a young artist, but her work at the summit drew my attention apart from that of an international fair director. Comprising metallic rhizome-like creatures falling from the ceiling, Swaroopini's work almost stated its claim to being the gigantic foliage that would remain on top of a lush tropical forest. With this, she seemed to reframe the summit booth space as an ecological system of its own.

Suchitra Gehlot: Shown by the Shrine Empire Gallery, Delhi. Gehlot is a young installation artist whose work, *A Thousand Tears*, stood out for its poetic quality and its gesture to recent art history. Gehlot displays, on a glass shelf, a thousand small pharmaceutical glass bottles, each labelled with a word describing an emotion or a moment. The viewer must walk around the shelf reading the labels for the work to be completed. In that sense, one edition of this work becomes several, depending on how many people see it and infuse it with their own emotional histories. In its white minimalism and use of pharma containers, the work acknowledges Damien Hirst's *Pharmacy*.

Nilesh Kumavat: By The Fine Art Company, Mumbai. Kumavat produces optical illusions that draw in the viewer as a decoder. He creates nearly flat surfaces that mirror a crowded bookshelf — the book spines are visible, forcing us to peer into his work, as it were, reading each title, as we would, in a library. But Kumavat is a narrator, and his device is the book not in order. Using the blank quality of a stack of bound ivory pages, he develops just a hint of a larger story, as if he were asking the viewer to pick out a book and complete the tale.

You'll notice that none of the five works are from blockbuster artists. You'll also notice that the galleries that showed these are in Delhi and Mumbai — clearly establishing these as the most important art centres in the country. For me, the most interesting aspect was that many of these are not the best-known galleries. Yet, they were the ones that decided to take risks and use the

expensive summit space to show something new. It is exactly this that has made them important contributors to the experience of the India Art Summit.

(bharati@chintan-india.org)