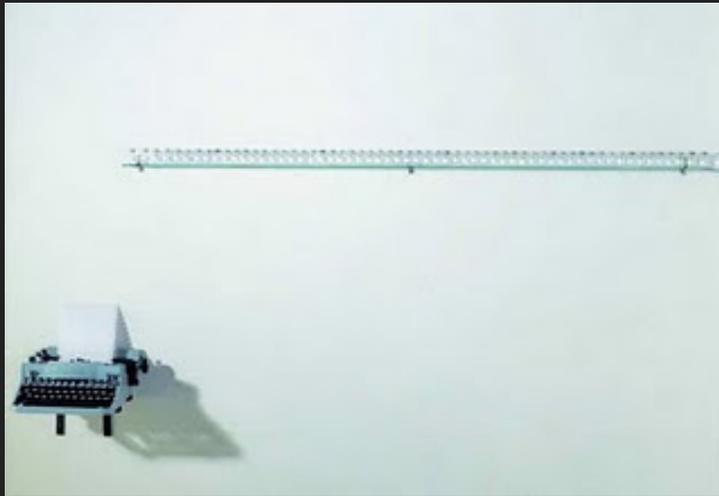


By All Means Necessary

Saturday, August 29, 2009

Performative Tears



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About Me



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Why did you cry last time? While standing before the mirror in your private bathroom, innocent and unpretentious, perhaps, everyday you ask this question to your mirrored self. Answers are abundant like the thousands streams of the shower jet, pricking, piercing and tickling. And many, you see them draining down through the steel mesh with a guttural sound. You may not want to answer this question in public. But here is an artist asking you to perform your moment of truth anonymously. In the virtual space of her website, artist Suchitra Gahlot asks you to say why you cried last. But here is the rider, you have to tell the reason in 'one' word.

'One Thousand Tears', an installation piece by Suchitra Gahlot, currently shown in Shrine Empire Gallery, New Delhi, has already been on in the virtual space for almost a year. Each time, some anonymous visitor types down the reason his/her tears, Suchitra carefully types the same word down using a vintage type writer and pastes the word on a 10 ml glass bottle half filled with a fluid resembling tears. Thousand such bottles are kept in a row on a three inches wide glass plinth. On the one end of the plinth, there is a vintage type writer, still holding a sheet of paper about to be 'typed'.

Some strange attraction takes you by force as you start reading the 'one word reasons' ranging from simple 'love' 'hate', 'friendship' etc to more socio-psychological issues like 'divorce', 'sex' and 'pms'. The apparent clinical cold detachment of the installation melts down as the viewing progresses only to reveal the inner layers of human psychology. Attached to the vials the tears and the one word labels tell us how ironic our existence is. Once we finish reading the 1000th bottle, suddenly we realize the voyeur in us. The disinterested aesthetic enjoyment is transformed here into a passionate voyeuristic pleasure. The mundane becomes obsessive and psychological. The private become performative and theatrical. This installation becomes a spectacle of voyeurism; a defining aspect of our times, where the personal pathos is airbrushed to glossy advertisements.

Suchitra, who has worked in the field of advertisement as a visualizer and copy writer, knows the power of words and visuals well; and that explains why her works are so minimal with catch lines as titles. 'Humming is Definitely Happier than Singing' has all the elements of a minimal theatrical performance. It is about a dialogue; could be between two characters, two incidents, two notions or anything. We see two chairs and a closer look reveals that the weaving is done with the tape from an audio cassette. The chairs thus become chairs of frozen dialogues. Despite the suggestive title, this assemblage hints at the archiving of words. You need a magnetic intervention for making them heard again. There is a sort of irreverent humor in Suchitra, which translates history into frozen chairs of analogue tapes.

The same irreverent humor takes an aesthetic form in 'One Thousand Tears Use and Throw Book'. Four customized tissue paper boxes constitute the work. The box resembles a vintage type writer.

You may take out a tissue paper, which has a 'word' typed on it, use and throw it into the dust bin. Nothing holds permanently, Suchitra seems to say. The sympathetic performance seen in the 'bottle installation' is reversed here into unconscious aggression of sorts. The same words that caught your voyeuristic attention are trashed and thrown into a dust bin. The viewer becomes a performer of two social roles within gallery space.

'Some Days I Wake up Thinking Is There Really a God' is another floor installation created by Suchitra. As I mentioned before, the title shows her affinity for copy writing; for creating catch phrases. This work has hundred inverted ice cream cones made of resin and painted over with acrylic colors. The artist suggests the irony of daily lives. Ice cream cones represent the preciousness of petty things in individual lives and they are thwarted at every other moment, which makes the artist wonder what the title says. For me, this work does not work well in the same place where the other three minimal installations are placed.

Suchitra is a finding of this art season. She was presented in the recently concluded India Art Summit, by Shrine Empire Gallery. Suchitra's visual takes on daily lives are refreshing with their minimal but strong visual presence. Her works embody the moments of spectacular voyeurism. Suchitra Gahlot can go a long way provided she makes further negotiations between the catch phrases and adequate visuals and objects.

Rating 6/10

Posted by JohnyML at 10:02 AM

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