

Matters Of Art, Artist in Focus, October 2009

Please tell our readers a bit about your background and how you were initiated into art.

My father served with the armed forces so I have grown up being a bit of a wanderer. From an early age I was exposed to a multitude of cultures, having lived in Kashmir and grown up in Hyderabad. I learned early to find a sense of belonging without being rooted in one place. I suppose that has all informed my sense of self and what I create, which can be many things and yet has a very personal language. My first formal involvement with art came through commercial art in advertising. Working within very strict parameters and deadlines, using a variety of techniques, ranging from illustration, graphic design, typography, photography and filmmaking gave me an exposure to the various techniques for expression. It also taught me the importance of detailing and craft, apart from simply feeding the creative

instinct. You are given a fleeting second and you have to capture the imagination of the man in the street, using wit, irony, hyperbole or whatever it takes. It is a challenge. And that is the reason why most of the advertising you see is just rubbish, and the ones that are good are the ones that shape and form popular culture. Another thing advertising taught me was not to take yourself too seriously. At some level, you're also just doing it for a lark. Art was my way of finding myself, seeking out individual expression, rather than an effort to end world hunger, if you know what I mean. Don't get me wrong. I don't mean to belittle the efforts of those who do. Selflessness and concern for others is what makes the world go round. And what makes us human. Art, to me, though is a fierce individualism.

How did you start working on One thousand tears? What triggered the idea?

'One Thousand Tears', was born from a migraine. I've suffered

from migraines for more years than I can remember and yet my cope mechanism is always the same. I need to shut myself in a dark room and wait it out in silence and through cold sweats. I can barely stand the sound of my own breathing. At some point, I lose the battle to prescription drugs and the tears begin to flow. Nothing is more democratic than pain and yet when you actually feel it, it is the loneliest feeling in the world.

For the installation, a thousand people from all over the world were asked to respond to the question 'why did you cry last?' Their anonymous one-word replies were labeled onto a thousand small vials. The vials were filled with a saline solution that matched the exact composition of human tears. The clinical arrangement that represents the intimate emotion of crying, makes this installation an interesting experience. As a viewer, you are able to observe the reasons for crying dispassionately and yet there is a discomfort in knowing that someone was moved to tears because of that

reason.

Was this your first art project?

Yes.

One of my favourite installations, which is not displayed in the gallery, is All I Have Ever Really Wanted is a Nice Cold Shower.

We live in a time of consumption and I am as guilty of 'retail therapy' as the next person. I've scoffed at parents for spoiling their children with new toys when I don't think twice about buying things that I don't need. Do I like myself for being this person? Not at all. Am I attempting to change? Not really. It's a vice I permit myself. It's not like I'm an axe-murderer. Being extravagant now and then doesn't seem so bad when you think of all the horrible things you could be. And yet there's no end to it. Everything you buy just gets old really quickly. So you feel the need to buy more stuff to feel happy about something. While everything else becomes habit, the rou-

tine act of a shower has always made me feel better.

Humming is definitely happier than singing also sounds like a personal work....

'Humming Is Happier Than Singing' is represented in a nostalgic piece where two chairs are gingerly bound together by reels of audio tape. Humming can fill a room even if you just sit in silence. It's not self-conscious like singing, it doesn't demand an audience. Humming just happens. I like that.

You have incorporated sculptural elements in your installation Some Days I Wake Up Thinking, Is there Really God? Was it deliberate?

'Some Days I Wake Up Thinking, Is there Really A God?', is represented by hundred spilled ice-cream cones that sum up that moment of 'Oops' which changes everything. What greater disappointment is there than fallen ice-cream? In our own lives,

things happen that are beyond our control and I have often prayed to a god I have at other times believed does not exist. The prayers that aren't answered affirm the presence of a god as much as the prayers that do. I suppose, in a strange way, faith is also about having that someone to blame.

How did the tie-up with Shrine Empire Gallery come about? Did they spot you?

Shefali and Anahita heard of my work through some friends. They came by the studio, liked what they saw and asked me to show with them at the Art Summit.