



Sexual Deviants Penises, copulating animals and urinals are all subject matter at T. Venkanna's solo show at Gallery Maskara.

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'Too Hungry Lion' by T. Venkanna. Photo courtesy of Gallery Maskara.

Those easily offended would do well to stay away from T. Venkanna's solo show 'Sacred and Profane' currently showing at Gallery Maskara. Sex in all its varying forms is the topic at hand here, and penises, inter-species copulation and urinals all make an appearance as subject matter. Like works from his previous shows at Gallery Maskara (two of which made it to London's Saatchi Gallery), there is an almost feverish aesthetic employed here. Venkanna studied print-making at MS University in Baroda, and his training is evident—there are frenzied collages of graffiti, impasto and pattern that reference a dizzying array of artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Damien Hirst, Gustave Courbet and Henri Rousseau (whose surreal forest tableaux are a Venkanna favourite).

Marcel Duchamp's urinal, probably the most appropriated symbol in contemporary art, is re-imagined as a blood-spewing demonic monster over-flooded with tiny wooden soldiers. Graffitied with anti-war slogans and phrases (the piece is titled 'Hope For Love'), it is just the starting point for a much larger work, composed of dozens of wildly coloured wooden figures (very much like what you'd find at a kitsch souvenir store anywhere in the country). Except on closer inspection, the figures show themselves to be inventive couplings of copulating animals—there's a rhino doing a turtle, a cat on a rabbit, a lion on a turtle, a frog on a shark, a pelican on a beaver and so on until you reach a miniature re-creation of the garden of Eden with presumably Adam and Eve fornicating in the centre. It's a complicated take on reality and perversion and a world which allows for copious bloodshed, but often balks at vivid sexual expression. The fornicating couple and urinal are situated as literal bookends to this allegory.

Most of the other works are similar in scope, unwrapping so many layers and realities that anything more than six works would have weighed the whole thing down. But here, in a neat showing of just six, Venkanna's skills as an artist, print-maker, and philosopher are all evidently on display. He has used some of art history's most heavily dissected works—Rousseau's 'The Hungry Lion Throws Itself on the Antelope,' Courbet's 'The Origin of the World'—as conspirators in a hijacking rather than masters to be preserved.

In Venkanna's hands, these images so familiar to any student of art history, are funny, and perverse and so willing to lend themselves to a 21st century interpretation. A leather-made cock (a male chicken, not the other kind) is used to pierce a key part of his rendering of Courbet's 'The Origin of the World' (Google the image and you'll figure out which part). Rousseau's forest-scape is given a violent and messy border. Duchamp's urinal spews blood. The sacred and the profane are clearly two sides of the same coin (die hard fundamentalists would do well to understand this). Venkanna clearly seems to have realised this early in the game.