

ART

The violent spectacle



Hammer and thread: (clockwise from left) Priyanka Choudhary's *Ypres at 1914-2014*; T. Venkanna's *Earth*; and Narendra Yadav's sculpture, *Indivisible Violent Particle*.

dra Yadav, Aaditi Joshi, Roshan Chhabria, Mansoor Ali and Meenakshi Sengupta. They have created new works for the series, which will be shown at a booth and a makeshift barrack at the India Art Fair from 30 January-2 February.

Venkanna's art has eclectic referencing, and his best canvases have combined the poetic and the profane. In his *Pancha Mahabhuta* series and earlier works, he has explored sexuality and the physical environment, often using images of extreme violence to depict both. In *Fuck Me I Have Nine Holes For You*, he painted an androgynous, dismembered figure, its face contorted in a scream, a bleeding heart clutched in its hand. His *Earth*, the work that Maskara will show at the Art Fair, is also a busy canvas, resembling a half-illuminated cave painting, with motifs from war and revival populating it.

Meenakshi Sengupta subverts the traditional miniature by introducing images of a metal detector and a bedroom space in it; Aaditi Joshi uses micro plastic for large installations; and Shine Shivan, an artist whose debut show *Sperm Weaver* was held at the Gallery Maskara in 2009, makes a constellation of taxidermied cock heads on a panel encased in glass. Narendra Yadav's *Amoeba Declares Post-Life Existence* allows the viewer to experience mortality through an

upturned mirror image, amid a collage of upturned portraits of dead people. Possibly the most austere but politically provocative piece in the series is Yadav's sculpture, *Indivisible Violent Particle*—a hammer with two heads of Mahatma Gandhi, placed on a half-broken cement edifice. Is non-violence really without violence? he asks. By allowing himself to suffer, to take the beating in principle, did Gandhi not profess violence upon himself?

Maskara has been in the process of realizing this show for a couple of years. In that time, he travelled to Auschwitz, Poland, with Venkanna and returned with a close and chilling understanding of the process of carrying out violence. He invited artists to reflect and respond to the nature of war—in Maskara's words, on "death, destruction, suffering of not just human beings but of all species that inhabit the earth; and war's crippling impact on the environment". He says, "The World War is just a kind of moment that should not and cannot be forgotten. The point is, we are part of its consequences. Everyday violence is a reality but we wanted the artists to respond to not just the horror, but things of a hopeful nature, resistance and renewal, that can come out of it."

1914-2014 is on show till 28 February, 11am-7pm (Tuesday-Saturday), at Gallery Maskara, 3rd Pasta Lane, Colaba, Mumbai. Gallery Maskara will also take the series to the India Art Fair, Delhi, 30 January-2 February. The prices of the works in the series range from ₹1 lakh-15 lakh.

A series of exhibitions commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of World War I

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There is an eerie force in Priyanka Choudhary's art, and the cold, high-ceilinged industrial space of Mumbai's Gallery Maskara has been an effective setting for it.

In her abstract and minimalist works shown at the gallery in 2010, the Delhi-based artist textured her canvases by slashing and cutting them, layering them with muslin, drilling nails and logs into them. In some canvases she allowed the rust of the nails to seep into the muslin. For the installation *Pubic*, she used logs used in scaffolding and at construction sites to depict the anger and pain of puberty, the work's larger idea being the trauma that the female body undergoes. The violence in her new solo, *1914-2014*, at Gallery Maskara—part of a series of four exhibitions that the gallery's owner Abhay Maskara has curated, commemorating the

centenary of the outbreak of World War I—demands less intuitive responses than those earlier works. They are more cerebral and polemical, communicating with the viewer directly.

Choudhary travelled to seats of extreme violence around the world—Tlatelolco (Mexico), Soweto (South Africa), Ypres (Belgium), New York's Ground Zero and Jallianwala Bagh (in Punjab)—and put up performance pieces there. This show is a record of those performances in the form of photographs and video.

The artist says: "The monuments to extreme violence are only too peaceful. They are placid lakes. Blind spots. I threw a small stone to ruffle the surface.... People gathered around me forgot to smirk. Peace had been disturbed for the better, I hope." The seat of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar had graffiti and litter when she visited. She noticed an ancient banyan tree next to the site, which struck her as a silent testament to



the carnage, and to the violent tides of the world thereafter. She tied herself to the tree and allowed people to see her and react to her.

This solo is the artist's way of conveying a steadily accumulating horror and disgust at large-scale violence around the world.

The first thought that emerges when this series is seen in totality is the general inadequacy of art in the face of traumatizing and violent world events. And that is also an index of the art's success,

because the mockery, dialectics and grotesquerie in the works take us closer to the real thing, and make us imagine the horror of seeing and living through war. By investing unrelated canvases with moods of mournfulness and alarm, the artists tell us the war is not over.

The series includes Choudhary's solo exhibition and three forthcoming group shows of eight artists—T. Venkanna, Shine Shivan, Prashant Pandey, Naren-