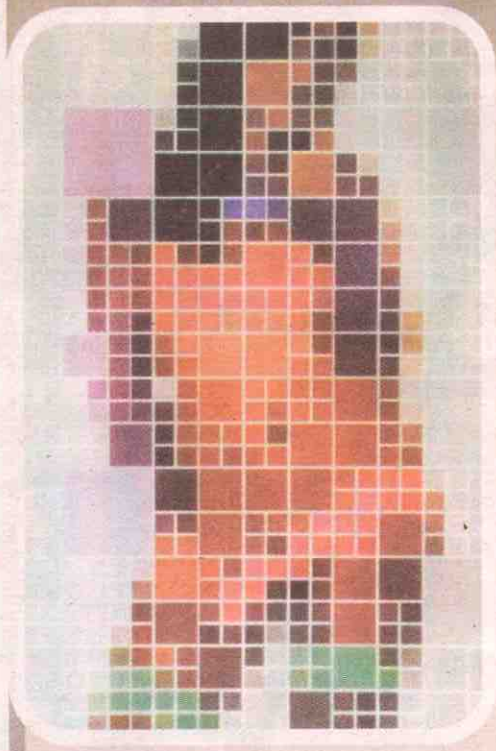




IN THE REALM OF THE SENSES

Latin lust meets local heat in a smart, sizzling group show



VISHWAS KULKARNI

Competition is healthy. It is evident from the spate of good art flooding our galleries these days, the effort proprietors are taking to put their best foot forward, even if the odd banana peel is never too far away — we live in a sordid society. *Loosentiefirst*, an exhibit curated by gallerist Abhay Maskara, is a sophisticated showcase. Aside from the five cher-

ry-picked artists, the exhibition also serves to mark Maskara as a cutting-edge curator capable of forging stimulating linkages between international artists and indigenous expression. And 'international' here isn't the capital of *Vilayat*, London. Maskara has taken good care to skip an ocean (or two) in locating some Brazilian funk to mix with the *desi* masala on offer here.

Brazilian artist Felipe Cama elevates smut to a higher plane: the artist has extracted the binary code of the jpegs of pornographic spam that floods our inboxes. The end results are glossy, delicious mosaic art, a series that gets successively more steamed up as you walk across it from the left to the right. Alternatively, you could walk in the reverse direction and shift gears from 'raunchiest' to 'just raunchy'. Fernanda Chieco's bland drawings (albeit at first look) are laboratories in themselves, performing twisted, bizarre experiments on the human body, even if the damage caused to the models appears minimal, even ornamental at times — ironically, some of the elements in these kinky machinations are maggots, mushrooms, fungi.

Mansoor Ali's *Dance of Democracy*, a pyramid of dusty, bureaucratic chairs is fun; his other installations are dull. Narendra Yadav throws us into a realm reminiscent of a school-tour to Nehru Science Museum, or even Taraporevala Aquarium perhaps, with his motor-driven installations. His *Chicken Pox* is witty, silly and brilliant: two hearts (that for some reason look like tandoori chicken at a roadside *dhaba*) keep rotating in a shiny, silver barbeque grill, the organs connected by tubes with blood-like fluid flowing inside them. The artist is trying to depict a condition

that happens "once in a lifetime", a coincidence much like love itself.

And then there is T. Venkanna, the superstar of this zany entourage. The Baroda-based artist, whose works focus on the sexual imagination, re-visits motifs and imageries from artists like Mondrian, Henri Rousseau, and other classical examples, but irreperably tweaks them with his patented perversity. Venkanna's world is a disturbed, hyper-erotised heaven (or is it hell?) where the sexual has conquered the psyche almost in entirety. Regular imagery (or any potential for a regular image) is thus corrupted with the cloud

of 'dirty' thoughts. The results are hypnotic. Silhouettes of couples copulating filled up with comic book characters, newspaper clippings defiled with horny doodlings, mythologies invented to further fuel the excesses of the pornographic emotion. Here is a man who is quite clearly the discovery of the year, even if the others certainly make for a truly funky experience.

Loosentiefirst is exhibiting at Warehouse, 6/7, 3rd Pasta Lana, Colaba, until October 29. Tel: 22023056.

