

# Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

## Shine Shivan

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MASKARA

by susan haggood



MUMBAI “Sperm Weaver” was a promising first solo show for the 27-year-old Indian artist Shine Shivan. Five clusters of provocative works made in 2009, all of which toy with traditional notions of masculine identity, filled the cavernous warehouse space. Leaving the chaotic street outside, one found a cool, dark interior and a dream world of gender play, manifested in a diverse array of sculptures, photographs and video. Shivan explicitly appropriated a female role with his in situ construction of two 11-foot-tall dung towers (these traditional rural forms are customarily built in India only by women); he does the same in his fabrication techniques, which include crocheting, weaving and sewing, and in his nude performances for the camera, where he vamps with bolts of transparent white fabric and frolics suggestively in a pool of white foam. While the actions and processes may be feminine, the forms most often refer to male genitalia and male sexuality: feminizing the masculine, he also does the reverse.

Notwithstanding the strength of Shivan’s video and photographic work, the most innovative pieces on view were sculptures hanging on the walls. Just inside the entrance was *Empty Spaces between Desire and Fantasy*, an arrangement of lozenge-shaped forms handcrafted from dried thorns, gourds, pumpkins and cloth, and stitched together with thread. Bristling threateningly, these ingeniously crafted shapes invite close scrutiny. Even more labor intensive is *Used Dicks*; its dangling forms are made from real bird nests fastidiously covered with a woven layer of Shivan’s mother’s hair. Navigating between the two phallic towers of cow dung, one was confronted by the most potent work in the exhibition, installed high up on the wall. A winged penis assembled from eagle and crane feathers, braided and coiled woven rags, and a bejeweled erect black phallus made of cloth, this exuberant expression of male sexuality is homoerotized by its title, *Rape of Ganymede*. (In Greek mythology, the boy Ganymede was the most attractive of all mortals. Taking the form of an eagle, Zeus swooped down and abducted him.)

Shivan casts a wide net of references: to mythology, to earthworks, to fellow Indian artists Tejal Shah and Sheela Gowda, certainly, and maybe to American artists Petah Coyne and Harmony Hammond as well. With his formal ingenuity and charged subject matter, Shivan will be a compelling artist to follow.

*Photo: Shine Shivan: Rape of Ganymede, 2009, taxidermy eagle and crane wings, semiprecious stones, fabric and thread, 18 by 40 by 12 inches; at Maskara.*