

Five (more) reasons to update your art

They're young, multi-platform and already on a commercial and critical success path. We navigated a crowd of emerging artists to pick the ones to watch out for.

Shine Shivan, 27

Soul-searching gender issues



Sexual subtext: Shivan's Rape of Ganymede is made with taxidermied eagle and crane wings. Photo: David De Souza

In what was christened as one of the most striking debuts in the recent past, Faridabad-based artist Shine Shivan overwhelmed viewers with a sense of shock and wonderment at his solo show, Sperm Weaver, which ran through December and January in Mumbai's Gallery Maskara (the sculptures were priced between Rs1.75-6 lakh). There was, among other sculptural installations, the Rape of Ganymede (2009), made with taxidermied eagle and crane wings, semi-precious stones and fabric. The piece was a throwback to the Greek myth of Zeus abducting the beautiful shepherd boy Ganymede. It highlighted the complexities of the gay male identity. The eagle wings represented independence, pride, resilience and physical strength—all traditional attributes of masculinity. The crane wings signified the diffident, emasculated identity of the stereotypical gay male. Using wings as a representation, his installation depicted the dominant male triumphantly penetrating through his more effeminate partner. Evoking this theme was ambitious by all counts, considering the Rape of Ganymede has been covered by masters such as Michelangelo and Rembrandt.

Another installation, Used Dicks, was based on an exploration of the nest-weaving habits of the Baya Weaver bird. Although weaving is socially viewed as a feminine act, in the case of the Baya

Weaver bird these roles are reversed. The male Baya Weaver weaves the “cockswing”-shaped nests that Shivan recreated. He used Baya Weaver nests, grass, coconut, cotton thread and human hair—his mother’s hair.

Like these works, all of Shivan’s creations are semi-autobiographical excavations of the nature of masculinity. He redefines psychological tropes attached to gender. His methodology is deeply personal—a fact that renders an authenticity to his works while



that fascinate him for years,” Ginwala says. Shivan explains how he only injects these objects into his art once they assume a special significance for him. “I don’t jump into things. I’d been seeing these Baya Weaver nests for 10 years before I decided to do something with them,” he says.

Shivan has a bachelor’s degree in fine arts from the Delhi College of Art and a 2008 master’s in visual arts from Dr BR Ambedkar University in Agra.

Shivan shifts between performance, new media, photography and sculpture, though presently he is most interested in exploring the performative aspect of his work and intends to weave in his training in Bharatanatyam to add to his performances. He is presently working on another solo for Gallery Maskara to be held later this year or in early 2011.

Shivan’s art suggests the instability of gender, implying that it can always be subverted by practices such as drag and cross-dressing. It is here that his interest in high fashion comes through. He admits to being highly influenced by designers such as Alexander McQueen and John Galliano.

Speaking with him, one would know instantly that he is a compulsive multitasker. Although he is almost childlike in narrating his ideas, his sculptures are extremely sound technically. Take Psycho Phallus for instance, an 11ft structure made from cow dung, grass and wood resembling the bitora (used for storing cow dung in north India).

One reason Sperm Weaver made waves is because Shivan is exceptionally young. It came about by happenstance. On a visit to Mumbai in early 2009, he had stopped by Gallery Maskara and left the curator Abhay Maskara a note along with a CD of his works. “Many young artists come by the studio but I was especially touched by that note,” recalls Maskara, who even went down to Faridabad to meet the artist.

What the curator values in Shivan’s art practice is his original visual language. “I work intuitively and I believe that art, no matter how complex it is, has to first grab me at a visual level,” Maskara says, explaining why he signed on Shivan. “Another thing I value is how connected the artist is to his work. Shivan’s art comes from his very core.”