

Pee language

It may not be quite palatable to those used to water colours, but some artists use body fluids to express themselves

Mansi Choksi | TNN

When Prashant Pandey tells someone that his work is a product of his *khoon-paseena*, it's not a filmi exaggeration. The 26-year-old artist from Baroda not only gave his blood and sweat for his first solo show in Mumbai, but also 350 litres of urine and roughly 20 tears.

WASTELAND

Not just human fluids, Pandey's body of work—which is ironically called *Shelf Life* and currently on show at Colaba's Gallery Maskara—uses other perishable non-conventional mediums like expired chocolate and sugarcane bagasse. Pandey says his visceral expression is about deconstructing perceptions about waste, whether cigarette butts, blood sam-

ples or expired chocolate and then reclaiming them. "While these objects may be of no use to others, my work is about transforming them into social symbols and destabilise opinions," he says.

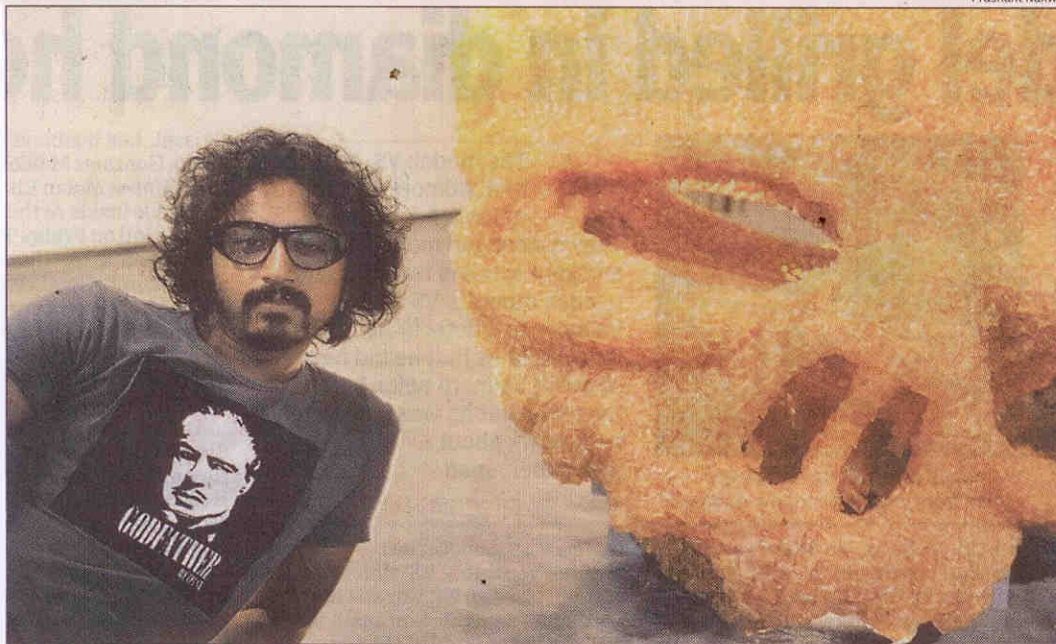
'Gift', which effectively destabilises the olfactory system, can elicit eclectic reactions with the lingering smell of urine emanating from tiny plastic pockets that also hold the artist's sweat, tears and formaldehyde. The pockets are stitched together to resemble the disfigured head of a female foetus. "Female fetuses are flushed out of the system like unwanted fluids like urine, sweat and tears," says Pandey, admitting the work is a culmination of eight long months during which his studio at Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda kept

piling up with bottles of human fluid supplies.

Then there's 'The Red', two rickety stacks of glass slides that are stained with Pandey's blood, cobwebs and iron, which the artist says, symbolise a potent interpretation of the experience of death. And a headless baby made of out expired chocolate explores the loss of innocence. "Each chocolate square is a memory; it will keep melting and exposing the iron structure underneath," says Pandey. After the smell of blood, urine and sweat, the nose is happily drawn to 'Universe', an embroidery of flowers made out of more than 3,000 flattened cigarette butts that Pandey scooped from the streets of Baroda. "This is



about the human love-hate relationship. You love to smoke a cigarette and then violently crush it after using it. I picked up the butts from the streets and made them flowers," says Pandey. Possibly the least likely to upset the nose is 'Crash Trash', a hollow structure made of chewed sugarcane that has a carved motif of a plane dis-



NUMBER ONE POSITION Prashant Pandey used his own urine to make Gift and expired chocolate for Untitled (L)

secting the centre as a comment on the violence of 9/11. "It is sugarcane stalk that has been sucked off all its juices; this is how the victims and survivors of World Trade Centre attacks must have felt," he says.

Pandey says his work is a result of soul-searching and a critical commentary of the utilitarian

way of life. "I come from a family of marble sculptors in Rajasthan. I've grown up watching chips from the rocks fall quietly; it's birth and death," he says.

Curator Abhay Maskara, whose gallery has a history of working with artists who've experimented with non-conventional mediums, says the gallery doesn't go out sniff-

ing out artists who use offbeat mediums. It hosted Belgian artist Peter Buggenhout and his household dust sculptures, Shine Shivan and his human hair, taxidermy and dung installations and even Tatheer Daryani and her mercury, blood and saliva works.

The first recorded use of body fluids in art was in 1961, when an Italian artist called Piero Manzoni packed 90 cans of his own excrement to be sold for their weight in gold. The most controversial, however, was an artwork called *Piss Christ* (1987) by Andres Serrano, which was a photograph of a crucifix submerged in urine.

"We don't have a medium prejudice. It could be conventional mediums like paint or wood but we are only concerned with how it changes in the hands of the artist," says Maskara. "It's about making us confront the way we think of work or life."

The curator says there is a need for a paradigm shift in mindset when it comes to non-conventional mediums. "Artists are constantly experimenting with new mediums, and collectors will sooner or later take cognisance," he says, adding that 'Universe' has already been sold to a French collector. "Some people still tend to have a predisposition and look at this form of art with a prejudiced eye."