

deepanjana pal

Notes from a show: Shelf-Life

So despite the death knells that were being rung earlier this year, so far this season is looking pretty darn good for Gallery Maskara. If we ignore that football weirdness by Riyas Komu (“From Subroto to Cesar”), the gallery kicked off this season with the rather beautiful “From NUL to now” by Priyanka Choudhary and their second show is another solid debut, “Shelf Life” by Prashant Pandey. While I’m not crazy about the piece made mostly of sugarcane (I think it’s called “Crash Trash”) or the little boy made of expired chocolate (the effect is too scatological for my, ahem, taste), there are few works there that I found interesting.



“Universe”, made of cigarette butts, is beautiful and well worth a cynical smirk as the un-recyclable filters are used to create this charming, organic-looking work. Even when you know the piece is made of discarded cigarette butts, it takes a moment to figure out what he’s done to them to create this delicate-looking work. It shows a really good sense of material and his skill in creating a sense of texture is really impressive. One of the things that I’m starting to expect from a Gallery Maskara show is a piece whose shadows are as much a part of the work as the material that makes it. “Universe” is that work. The cigarette butt flowers cast a lacework-like pattern that is just enchanting. Someone mentioned they could smell the stale cigarettes, which would be a great counterpoint to the idea of the flowers, but I can’t remember if I was struck by any odour when looking at “Universe”.



The untitled work that shows a cobweb and a spider in a glass box was also one of my picks of “Shelf-Life”. Once again, it’s fragile-looking, and it’s an intriguing idea to take something that generally signifies neglect and turning it into carefully crafted art. Of course, whether it’s the spider that is the artist or Pandey is a separate debate. But if the works in “Shelf-Life” are any indication, then both spider and Pandey work with a meticulous diligence. I wonder if Pandey feels as trapped as the spider. Cobwebs appear again in “The Red”, a sculpture made of blood slides and iron. Maybe I’ve watched too much Dexter but the blood slides look weirdly pretty. They’re arranged to look like two towers and I refuse to make any 9/11 comments because surely that’s the most obvious connection. As with “Universe”, Pandey uses transparency very well in “The Red”. The ambient lighting highlights this and the effect is definitely eye-catching.

Everyone who has seen the show seems to have been bowled over by “The Gift”. It’s definitely something of a spectacle. Little pouches of urine, sweat and tears have been put together to create a skull. The piece is meant to be a comment against female infanticide and while we can’t know for certain if that’s sweat and tears in the bags, anyone with a nose that isn’t blocked can tell that the urine claim is no lie. Technically speaking, it’s quite impressive. For me, though, “Universe” is a subtler work and consequently more of a personal favourite.

As a debut, “Shelf-Life” deserves a round of applause. My only criticism is that not all the works really tie in together and the pieces seem to be arranged in a haphazard cluster. I know it’s not actually a haphazard cluster but it felt that way. Walking in, I didn’t know where I should begin or how one followed the other. But that’s just a minor point.

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